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THE GUIDING THREAD

THE GUIDING THREAD

BY
BEATRICE HARRADEN

*Author of "Interplay," "Out of the Wreck
I Rise," "Ships that Pass in the Night," etc.*

*"O the blest eyes, the happy hearts,
That see, that know the guiding thread so fine
Along this mighty labyrinth."*

Birds of Passage: WALT WHITMAN

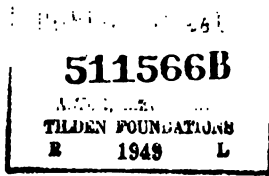


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THE GUIDING THREAD

PART I

CHAPTER I

IT was in the late autumn of the year 1912. Joan Holbrook stood before a shop window in Great Portland Street looking at the caged dogs and birds and other animals displayed for sale. There was a parrot in the doorway, just one of those ordinary gray birds with the red neck which claimed her special attention. It was talking continuously and she was amused to hear separate snatches of opinion and conversation woven into an uninterrupted whole.

The parrot said:

"Good morning, Nell. Sausages again for breakfast, damn it. Splendid book, Thomas Hardy for ever, that's my opinion, devil take my eyes. Good morning, Nell, pretty Nell. Cecil Rhodes great man. Sausages again for breakfast, damn it. Splendid book, Thomas Hardy for ever. Ha, ha, aren't you clever, Nell, pretty poll, pretty poll, learn all I tell you, learn anything —"

Joan Holbrook lingered for such a long time, that the man who himself looked like a bird, a hawk with a hungry eye, came out to see whether he had secured a customer.

"A wonderful bird, ma'am," he said. "Don't she rattle it all off just wonderful?"

"Yes," Joan said, but she shuddered as she spoke, and

moved away. The smile of amusement on her face had died into something very much resembling horror. Self-revelation comes often with a blinding flash of lightning and in chance circumstances. Joan had realized at last that she was only a parrot and nothing else.

"A parrot," she repeated to herself as she went on her way towards the Circus, and she stopped once or twice, unconscious of her surroundings, of the passers by, the noise, the traffic. She was nearly run over by a motor car in crossing the road, and the chauffeur who drew up in time shouted at her with a considerable complement of angry words, which were lost on his victim.

"You should look where you're going," the constable said not unkindly as he piloted her to the pavement.

"A parrot," she said aloud, and he nodded and remarked indulgently:

"Well, he did swear like a parrot. That's true. But you ought to look where you are going, you know."

When she had reached the Tube Station, she paused outside, and some inner prompting urged her to return to the birdshop, with that irresistible insistence which often drives one back however reluctantly to some harrowing scene of horror and suffering. She retraced her steps, and again stood listening to the parrot's mechanical outpour of language.

Again the man came out to her. He was accustomed to the ways of people, and it was part of his business never to be annoyed at their untimely departure nor surprised by their timely return.

"Yes, ma'am, a wonderful bird," he said, as though continuing the interrupted conversation of a few minutes ago: "A bargain, too. Two pounds—a mere nothing for a talking bird like her. Well, we'll say thirty-five shillings for a good home. There now. That's a bargain and no mistake. Won't you buy her?"

"Buy her," Joan said, turning on him with sudden

fierceness and all her secret anger against herself and her circumstances surging up in her breast. "*Buy her. Kill her, that's what I want to do.*"

The bird fancier was so astonished that he could only stare at her in silence. The words rose to his lips: "Well, buy her *and* kill her. It's all the same to me, you know." But he did not speak them, for there was an arresting signal of tragedy on her thin face, an acuteness in her eyes and an encompassing dignity about her small slight form which compelled from him a capitulation of wondering respect. He watched her as she walked quickly away, then turned to the parrot which was rolling its little black eyes about and holding its head on one side as though immersed in thoughts of wisdom, and said:

"Well, poll, pretty poll, what do you make of that, I wonder? Nothing, I expect."

The parrot remained silent.

CHAPTER II

MEANTIME Horace Holbrook, Joan's husband, was talking about her to Will Beaudesart, an old friend who had arrived unexpectedly to see him after a separation of several years, one of those tacit estrangements which often occur when marriage breaks up old habits and induces new ones. Will had no idea that guests were seldom received at that isolated little home on the moors, and that when he got off at the station about three miles away and began to tramp in the direction told him by the station-master, he ran a risk of having the door shut in his face. He did not even notice that the station-master's manner was sympathetically discouraging.

"That's the *way* to it," he said doubtfully. "That's the *way* to it right enough. You can't miss the *way*."

He was going to add:

"But you won't get into the house."

But something in Beaudesart's easy and joyous bearing persuaded him not to throw cold water on the pleasant stranger's plan of action. Not every day did he get the chance of being uplifted and gladdened by a traveler with an "aura" like Will Beaudesart's. If the station-master could have interpreted his vague thought into words, he probably would have said: "*There goes a free spirit with a free pass on all the lines.*" He could not however attain to this degree of philosophic reflection, but he at least behaved in a manner which was symbolic of an escape from the fetters of middle-aged moroseness. He whistled suddenly a long-forgotten tune of his boyhood, and went on whistling as he watched

Beaudesart gradually disappear into the distance. He was still whistling when he turned to survey the chrysanthemums in the railway garden and the name of the station picked out in glaring white stones in the flower beds which were the pride of his middle-aged heart.

And Will, unconscious of the interest he had aroused, hurried on with buoyant step and ever increasing eagerness. For he had suddenly determined to put an end to this absurd estrangement, and break in on the privacy of Horace's home. He longed to see old Horace himself, and he was anxious to know what he had made of his marriage with the blacksmith's daughter. Had he carried out his queer theories and intentions? Had he found happiness? Had she found happiness? And what about Horace's health? Was he stronger than in the old days? And his work? Had he made headway with that history of the Albigenses, or had he given it up and devoted himself entirely to the study of the Renaissance? All these thoughts crossed his mind as he at length approached a field, fenced in with barbed wire like any other grazing field, but recognizable as the one he wanted because of a letter-box attached to a post with the initials H. H. painted in white, together with Horace's bookmark designed by Beaudesart himself. Will's face beamed with pleasure.

"Ah, he's still using that, is he?" he said aloud. "A rattling good little design, too, though I say it. A lantern in the shape of a book. A book ought to be a lantern, or else it isn't a book, but only print and paper. So he's still using it. Shows I'm not altogether wiped out of his remembrance."

Then off he dashed up the field towards a rather desolate looking habitation which stood on a slight eminence. It was surrounded by a corral, such as one would see, for instance, encircling a cattle ranch in the Western States of America, and it had much the same appearance, not

of neglect, but of absence of charm and studied care. Will Beaudesart passed into the enclosure and knocked at the dwelling house which looked like a large barn with a really noble roof. There had evidently been additions from time to time to this, the original building; and the whole effect was that of a collection of shanties of various sizes and heights, dropped down anywhere without thought or plan, the chance spaces between having been filled in afterwards. Will, as he stood waiting to be admitted, decided that he rather liked the place.

"A relief from the well-planned, well-groomed homes of that dangerous class, the well-to-do," he said. "No garden, I see. But even that is better than well-kept flower beds, with geraniums predominating, and a blameless blue border."

As no one came to the door, he knocked again, with a mystic code of rapping known only to himself and his intimate comrades in the old days of good fellowship. Still there was no response. Finally he opened the door and went into a large room, rather dark, and with a low ceiling. It was empty except for a few packing cases, several piles of books strewn carelessly around, and an old harmonium discarded in the corner. A ladder staircase led to the upper part of the house through an opening in the floor. Will surveyed the scene for a moment, and decided to explore the regions above.

"Hang it all," he said, "I had the impulse to come and I won't turn back now to please anyone. Up then, Will, my boy, and meet friend or foe face to face."

He sprang up the ladder, lifted the trap door, and found himself in a large comfortable living room. And fast asleep on a couch lay Horace Holbrook, pale and ashen as death.

Will stood looking at him, and then shook his head.

"Drugs, Horace," he said in a whisper. "And you swore you would give them up, old chap."

He sank into an easy chair by the fireside, lit his pipe, and waited comfortably until something should occur. Something would occur, of course. Horace would probably awake. Probably Mrs. Holbrook would appear on the scene from somewhere. And failing either of these events, there would certainly be other unforeseen developments in accordance with the ever active principle of life.

"At the North Pole, a bear might come round the corner," he reflected. "In the jungle, a tiger. In a deserted church, a stray worshiper. In the Desert, a Suffragette. Perhaps a Suffragette here too."

Beaudesart smiled. One never knew where they would be, of course.

At that moment Horace, whether from horror at the probabilities thus catalogued, or from eagerness to welcome them, suddenly woke, rubbed his eyes, saw some one sitting in the armchair smoking, and darted fiercely to his feet.

"Who's that?" he exclaimed angrily. "Who has dared to intrude here? I receive no visitors."

"No, you evidently don't, old man," Beaudesart said, rising. "They have to receive themselves."

The angry clouds cleared instantly from Horace Holbrook's countenance, and a flush of pleasure spread over his face. He held out both his hands.

"Will," he said. "Will."

The two friends stood hand-locked in silence. One by one Horace had let his friends drop out of his life, or had quarreled with them and parted from them in anger and disgust. But at least the memory of Will Beaudesart had remained unimpaired in value, and although he had made no attempt to see him, he had regarded him ever as the ideal friend and comrade on equal terms, raised above all differentiations of thought, code and conduct, and in his relationship with others, inde-

pendent of time, place and circumstance. Seven years of separation were bridged over in the silence of a moment.

"Look here, you'd better make the tea," Holbrook said. "That was always your office, wasn't it? We won't wait for Joan. She has gone to London, but she'll soon be back. Ah, Will, my boy, you'll see when she comes what a success I've made of my marriage. I admit I took a risk. But it has worked out splendidly."

"Well, that's ripping news," Beaudesart said. "Yes, I'll see after the tea. It'll seem like old times, won't it? Upon my word, it is encouraging to find that you at least haven't become a swell in Grosvenor Place or Buckingham Palace, with butlers and chauffeurs and all that outfit. I saw poor Eridge the other day. The poor devil is surrounded with all that sort of tribe, and looks the picture of woe. What a downfall for a creative artist. And his wife blazing with diamonds. I suppose Mrs. Holbrook don't by any chance blaze with diamonds?"

"Not many diamonds here," laughed Horace. "They wouldn't be allowed. But they would not be wanted either. Joan thinks as I think. I've seen to that."

He paused in the act of pouring water into the kettle, and turned round to Beaudesart.

"You see, Will, I've practically created her mind," he said gravely. "Seven years. Seven years of dogged, patient training. Seven years of quiet persistence in imprinting on the blank tablets of her mind my own views and ideas, my own opinions of art, letters, life and religion. It has been an amazing, a thrilling experience."

He paused.

"Yes," he added. "A most thrilling experience. Creating a human intelligence. Forming a human soul."

"Poaching on the Almighty's territory, it seems to me," Will thought, but he did not venture to express his sentiment. All he said was:

"Ah, by Jove, ah, by Jove."

"You should hear her on the subject of Leonardo da Vinci," Horace continued proudly. "I assure you I sometimes sit and wonder myself. A little wild, ignorant village girl. A blacksmith's daughter, Will. Think of that."

Will nodded and cut a large chunk of bread which he proceeded to cover with jam.

"I've kept her safe from all other influences," Horace went on. "Of course I've allowed no outside circumstance to make my self-imposed task more difficult. We've lived cut off from other people—even from you, as you know. Absolutely isolated from every one. It had to be if I wished my scheme to prove successful."

"And has she been content?" Will asked a little doubtfully.

"Content? Of course she has been content," Horace answered with a smile. "Why, I almost believe that if I had planned to murder some one, Joan would be content to help me carry out my design. What do you think of that?"

"A good thing for her, then, that murders aren't in your line," Will laughed. "Or used not to be, anyway. Perhaps they are now, though. People change so, don't they? Poor old Eridge, you know. I never can get him out of my head when I once begin about him. Imprisoned in prosperity. Embracing his bondage. There's a change for you if you like. After that, anything is possible. Even you blossoming out into a murderer with the loyal help of a devoted wife."

Horace laughed, and looked at his watch.

"Let us hope I quoted an extreme instance of the possibilities of her co-operation," he said. "But you'll soon see for yourself how wonderfully devoted and tractable my little Joan is. Five minutes more, and she'll be here. Do you know this is the first time she has been

away from me. She had to go up to London to see an oculist, and I was going with her, of course. But suddenly I felt so deadly queer and dizzy that when it came to the point, I stopped behind. But I've been uneasy about her all the time."

"I don't wonder," Will said. "Taxicabs and fogs. Traffic and noise. A bewildering though beloved spot."

"Ah, I don't mean tangible things," Holbrook said. "I mean intangible things—influences waiting in ambush everywhere—influences swift and subtle, ready to spring up from unexpected quarters. And I not there to ward them off, Will. Secret psychic agencies. Transmissions. Of these I have always been in dread. They would ruin this work of mine which has been my pride."

"But hang it all, old man," Will said, glancing at his friend with a keen but swift analysis, "there won't have been time for devastation by influence. Much more likely by taxicabs. Do take this amount of comfort, strange though it sounds and seems."

Holbrook shook his head.

"Influences can close round us in a moment, Will," he said. "Don't you know that? I've seen it over and over again. Had the experience myself. Some chance word, some chance look, some chance happening—and the thing is done. That's why I've been on my guard the whole time with Joan. Even here, in this very room, I've had to guard her. A woman came here once with a letter of introduction from my lawyer. A medical woman. I heard her begin to air some of her views, and I made short work of her. Out she went. And old Scott came once and said something to Joan about solitary confinement being bad for every one. '*Rise, resist, rebel,*' he said to her. I can hear him now. And I can see on her face a vague puzzled look. I turned him out, too. Neck and crop I turned him out."

"*You turned the old man out neck and crop,*" Will repeated mechanically.

"Yes," Holbrook said fiercely, "and would any one who dared to come and interfere here."

Will Beaudesart rose. He suddenly remembered the station-master's discouraging though kindly manner when he had asked the way to Horace Holbrook's house.

"It begins to strike my dull mind that I ought not to have ventured here," he said. "By Jove, by Jove, that's how it strikes me."

He caught up his hat. He looked a little confused and sheepish, as one realizing that he had made a fool of himself.

"Well, I'm off anyhow," he said, making a dash for the trap-door. "Good morrow."

But Holbrook sprang after him and detained him.

"No, no," he said excitedly, "not you. I never meant that remark for you. Though I've not sought you out all these years, you stand apart, and have always stood apart. My best friend always. I've just been a fool rattling on in an insane way. I believe I've got those influences on the brain, Will. Forget what I've said. For Heaven's sake settle down again and tell me what you yourself have been doing all this time. Don't go off like that and leave me feeling — well, *awful*."

Will saw the look of real distress on Holbrook's face, and heard the ring of sincerity in his voice.

"All right," he said simply, and he slipped back to his chair as if nothing had happened to make him leave it, poured out some fresh tea for himself, and began to tell Horace about one or two of his journeys in the East, and about his pictures.

"You must see my pictures," he said. "I must really insist on this act of sacrifice. By Jove, I do think them good, though no one else does!"

But although he went on chattering in his easy, happy

fashion, he knew well that Holbrook was not listening to a word he said, and that he was thinking only of Joan and of those intangible, hostile influences of which it was obvious he was in permanent dread.

At last sounds were heard below, and Horace, with a sigh of relief which he did not attempt to suppress, said:

"It is Joan."

To Beaudesart's surprise he did not go down to greet her and did not even rise from his chair. He sat quite still and waited, like a trap-door spider, and Beaudesart, fearing to make a mistake if he yielded to his own natural impulses of courtesy and friendliness, also sat and waited like a trap-door spider. But observers would have noticed the curious difference of the expressions on their faces. Beaudesart looked like a wondering child told to keep quiet for no obvious reason, whilst Holbrook's countenance suggested the impassiveness of secret power not wholly untouched by cruelty. Joan mounted the stairs, lifted the door and appeared on the scene with the swiftness of a bird. She did not look at nor notice Beaudesart, but went straight to her husband, put her arms round him and nestled her little head for one moment against his neck. He carressed that little head, and said:

"My little Joan, my little Joan."

Beaudesart watched them both with acute interest, and felt no embarrassment at being there unheeded and, as it were, an intruder. It was evident he did not exist for either of them; and the result to him was that he just felt himself to be a spectator at a play, an Ibsen play perhaps, observing impersonally and dispassionately the relationship between two of the leading characters and the effect on each other of their individual temperaments. He was struck, too, with Joan's appearance. She was small, slight, and not in the least beautiful, but she had bright, piercing eyes, and her movements suggested the unfet-

tered grace of some young wild animal, with a reposeful reserve of strength and reckless dash. She was dark. She might have been Spanish, except for the eagerness written on her face, obviously an inherent characteristic which had nothing in it of Spanish languor and lethargy. Will noticed that her dress, of some dark material, was of the simplest, more like a child's frock than a grown-up person's; and yet he knew that nothing that the grandest Parisian dressmaker could have devised, would have suited her to such entire perfection. He laughed to think he had asked whether she wore diamonds. Diamonds indeed! One might just as well have asked whether a swallow piercing the air wore diamonds, or a gazelle bounding from rock to rock, or a cotton-tail rabbit dashing through the sage brush in Arizona.

At last she became aware of his presence, and when she turned to him, Horace said:

"My old friend, Will Beaudesart."

"Ah," she said, rather shyly. And she looked at Will a moment, glanced a little anxiously at Horace, and then, as if she read in his eyes a tacit consent, held out her hand to the stranger.

"How do you do?" she said gravely. If she had the impulse to add anything, she certainly checked it. But Will, in thinking afterwards over the episode, knew for certain that he had seen on her face a distinct though fleeting expression of welcome and relief, as if some wholly unexpected ship of rescue had suddenly hove in sight.

After that, she did not appear to take much personal notice of him. But in a curiously detached and impersonal way she recognized the fact of his presence, and did not allow him to feel outside the pale of quiet intimacy and companionship. She talked a good deal, was bright and gay, and gave an amusing account of her interview with the oculist and a description of his appear-

ance which called forth shouts of laughter from Horace, who seemed to be pluming himself on her powers of narration, and who now and then winked at Will by way of claiming from him a sympathy of appreciation.

"But now to come to the most important part of the interview," she said brightly, "the part for which you had the privilege of paying the fee, Horace. My eyes are all right organically, but they are addicted to cramp. And I am not to wear glasses, and I'm not to look too close to the book. This distance, for instance. Mark it well, Horace, and if I transgress, whip me."

She laughed as she spoke, and threw the book down on the couch.

"Such a relief to hear only that," she went on. "Fancy if he had said I was never to read. Fancy if I could not have gone on with the study of the Italian Renaissance."

"The Italian Renaissance!" Will exclaimed in an unguarded moment. "What on earth do you know about it, I wonder?"

"What on earth doesn't she know about it, I wonder," Horace said proudly. "I tell you I'm astonished myself. There, tell him what you were saying about Savonarola the other day. Read him out that passage from John Addington Symonds, and afterwards your own comments and reflections on it. You know the passage I mean, where he describes him as still 'wavering between strange dread and awful joy, as he beheld, through many a backward rolling mist of doubt, the mantle of the prophets descend upon him.' Do you remember?"

She sprang up, ran to a bureau at the far end of the room, opened a drawer, laid hands excitedly on a green notebook and ran back, her face flushed, her eyes feverishly bright. She knelt by the fireside, fingered the notebook, and began to read passages aloud to Horace, some

of her own, and then that particular one from Symonds to which he had referred. It ran thus:

“That Savonarola believed in his own prophecies there is no doubt. They were, in fact, a view of the political and moral situation of Italy, expressed with the force of profound religious conviction and based upon a theory of the divine government of the world. But how far he allowed himself to be guided by visions and by words uttered to his soul in trance, is a somewhat different question.”

Then she looked up from the book, and began to improvise, in a most curious manner, at times spasmodic, and at other times with a fair amount of continuity, on Savonarola's visions, on his studies of the Hebrew prophets, on the wrestlings and the questionings of this strong-fibered intellect — that was the word she used — and on the mysterious borderland which separates healthy intuition from morbid hallucination. The effect was as if some clockwork, the mechanism of which was not perfect, had been set going, and was trying with heroic effort to respond to the demands made on it by the hand which had wound it up. This at least was the impression produced on Will Beaudesart's brain.

But evidently not on Horace Holbrook's. He leaned back in his chair, his hands clasped together in quiet contentment, and a smile, half of pride, half of wonder, wreathed about his thin lips. He nodded silent approval as he listened to his own carefully chosen words, his own reflections, his own explanations, his own deductions, his own views. Joan's mind was his mind. He had created it, and with such guarded carefulness that she had never been conscious of the processes to which she had been subjected. Of that he was quite convinced, and he was even more confirmed in this belief by her spontaneous and almost joyous outpouring of intellectual resources at this very moment.

On and on she went, touching on this point, touching on that point. And at last she said:

"You know it is one thing to be a prophet in the sense of discerning the catastrophe to which circumstances must inevitably lead, and quite another thing to trace beforehand the path which will be taken by the hurricanes that change the face of the world. And I think that if Savonarola had lived one century earlier, we should not have called him prophet. I feel sure of that. It was the Renaissance which set the seal of truth upon his utterances. His vision . . ."

She broke off suddenly. The green notebook which she had been clutching convulsively in her intense excitement dropped from her right hand. She had been bending forward eagerly, her right knee on the floor, and her left arm resting on her other knee; and for a brief moment she remained in this position, arrested by some invading thought. Then she rose and stood erect. Her arms fell limply to her side. Her face wore an expression of intense distress and dismay. She seemed to be listening to some sound in the air, acute to her, but unheard by the others.

"What is it — what's the matter — are you ill?" the men both cried, coming towards her.

She looked at them and saw them not. She beat her breast.

"The parrot, the parrot," she said in a low voice, tense with secret suffering.

Then with bowed head she left them.

CHAPTER III

THE two men looked at each other for a moment in silence, and then Horace Holbrook, who had turned deadly pale, said in a hollow voice:

"Danger everywhere. Transmissions. Subtle influences. Secret psychic agencies. Danger everywhere. Didn't I tell you so?"

Will made no answer. He was feeling entirely bewildered with the situation, and longed to be safely home in his studio in St. John's Wood. He stooped and picked up the book of notes from the floor, and stood holding it, wondering with all his brain what he should do next. Suddenly it struck him that the only thing to do was to go. This was not his job. It was better to clear off at once, and kinder to leave old Horace alone.

"I'm at the inn to-night if you want me, old fellow," he said as he put the book on the stool. Horace gave an almost imperceptible nod. He seemed held in deep thought, and did not show any interest in Beaudesart's departure. And when he was by himself he still stood as one riveted to the ground. He clutched his chin convulsively with his right hand. He must have remained thus fully for a quarter of an hour. Was he perhaps waiting for Joan to return? Was he perhaps making up his mind to go and find her and learn from her what she meant by her strange behavior? Was he struggling with the stress and strain of mental effort to trace to its hidden source the reason for this amazing outbreak?

Who can tell? One thing only is certain, and that is that he suffered terribly in that short spell of time, and that when at last he roused himself, his movements

seemed those of a frail old man, stricken by an access of infirmity. He took a few tottering steps forward, supporting himself by a chair, a table, the couch, and disappeared into his little workroom which adjoined the living room, and turned the key inside.

About twenty minutes later Joan came. Her face was flushed, and she appeared to be in a state of intense mental excitement. She glanced around the room, saw that it was empty, saw that Horace's workroom was closed, saw the notebook on the stool. The sight of that notebook roused suddenly some elemental rage in her whole being. She bent her slight body forward, as a wild animal might bend before taking a leap and descending on its prey. She sprang at it, tore it with a passionate fury and cast it into the fire. Then she rushed to the further end of the room, dashed at the bureau, caught up the other notebooks, rent them ruthlessly and flung them too into the fire.

For one moment she paused, arrested by the horror of what she had done. But only for one moment. Fierceness, defiance, rebellion again claimed her for their own, and with her arms thrown above her head, and the light of battle in her eyes, she fled down the stairs, out of the house, out of the enclosure, out of the fields, through the lane and on to the moor — and always, always on.

The raging wind caught her in its embraces, wrapt her round, folded her to its breast and heart, and roused in her all that was wild and elemental. The spirit of the moors summoned her spirit with a fierce imperiousness softened by the tenderness of an inalienable claim. Countless voices assailed her ears with one and the same exhortation; and messages were borne to her on the wings of the tempest, in the moanings of the pines, in the creaking of the gorse bushes, in the sudden gusts that tore along the ground and swept the dead brown bracken further in the direction of the sea beyond.

All nature was calling out to her to be free.

Her answer rang out across the moors, in accents vibrating through the tumult of the wild storm.

"I will be free," she cried.

But even as she uttered the words, a bitter doubt arose in her mind as to whether there remained anything of her own individuality to be free. Was there, for instance, anything left with which to think her own thoughts? Had she any thoughts of her own? Had she ever had any thoughts of her own? What had she been like before he came into her life? She tried to bridge that separating gulf, and to remember. And just as she was touching the shore of that distant land of the past, the memories of her childhood, now within her reach, were swept from her with sudden ruthlessness, and in their place sprang up unwelcome thoughts of the Renaissance and her share in the writing of the history.

In her rage with herself, she tore up a bush and flung it far afield.

"Always the parrot," she cried. "The parrot's words — the parrot's mindless repetitions. It's not to be borne. It shan't be borne."

She fought her invisible foes on that lonely moor with a reckless valor before which they were forced to retreat, and found the lost trail back into her former life.

Her father, the blacksmith. She could see him working at his forge, and could see the sparks flying from the anvil. She could hear his cheery voice ringing out above the noise of his hammer. And what was it he used to say when she stole in to watch him at his work? He used to say: "*Here comes the pride of the forge — the brightest little spark ever beaten out of steel!*" The pride of the forge, the pride of his heart. That was what she had been in those days. And what used she to think of? What used she to dream of? What did

she have in her mind in those days? Perhaps nothing. Certainly nothing that mattered. But at least she was herself, whatever that was, bright with her own brightness, eager with her own eagerness. She was sure of that.

Yes, she remembered dozens of things which she had done and been of her own accord, no one suggesting to her, no one planting the thought in her brain, nor starting the impulse in her emotions. She was not then a bit of mechanism wound up and made to go. No, she had only become like that since Horace had taken her away from her own home and her surroundings, and built round her a prison house from which she had not even wished to escape. Her father whom she loved so dearly had died, and she had scarcely cared. Her mother had died and she had not cared at all. Her sister had married and gone to British Columbia, and Joan had not bestowed on her one parting thought of regret. But oh, how she longed for them all now, with an unspeakable longing, an agony of regret. She stretched out her arms to them as if she saw them coming to meet her on the moor; and if it be true that the so-called dead are with us when we need them most, then it was indeed their presences that brought Joan sudden and mystic comfort when she sobbed out: "Oh, my mother — oh, my father — I was the pride of the forge, the pride of your heart — and I left you."

But she had never meant to leave them in that way. She did not know even now how it had all come about. She could not remember any single moment when she realized that she was drifting away from them. She could only say that Horace had wanted her to be his only, to learn all he taught her and only what he taught her, to rejoice when he praised her, to be his entirely, with no individuality of her own, no separate existence of her own, no brain of her own. Well, she had learnt

what he had taught her only too thoroughly, and now what she most desired to do with that knowledge, was to throw it to the winds and be free of it, so that she might begin again, on her own lines. But how to begin? And what to do? If she could only speak to some one.

But there was no one. No one in the world. Certainly not Horace. Horace would never understand. He would think she was mad. Was she mad? Or had she been mad, but was now sane? Or was he mad? No one to speak to. Think of that—the world full of people, and not a single person to whom she could go and unburden her mind. What a revelation of isolation! Well, the first step was for her to break through that. But how? Suddenly the thought of Will Beaudesart flashed like lightning through her brain, and was gone. One flash of hope and help—and then a darkness again in which Joan's spirit vainly groped, sometimes fierce, sometimes fearful, sometimes remorseful, but ever in revolt.

It was midnight when she turned home again. The wind had died down a little, and the heavens, though still storm-swept with angry and tumultuous clouds, nevertheless here and there vouchsafed the vision of a star, pale and harassed, it is true, in a tornado setting, yet harbinger of eventual peace. Horace was standing outside the house, and when he heard her footstep, he came forward to meet her.

"Joan," he said in a voice that trembled from anxiety, "is that you at last?"

He was holding the lantern, and she saw that his face was strangely drawn and tired.

"I have looked for you far and wide," he said. "I have called and called for you. Why did you go off like that? Why have you stayed out in this wild night? You have made me very anxious."

"I am sorry," she said.

"Why did you go off like that?" he repeated. "I've never known you to do anything of the sort before."

"I had to go off," she answered stubbornly.

"Well, come into the warmth," he said, and he led the way into the barn, stopped to let her pass in, and then locked the door and followed her into the living room. She did not offer a single word of explanation, but made straight for the fire, crouched down and warmed her hands. She did not once look round, nor show by any sign whatsoever that she was conscious of his presence. He stood watching her as if pondering what he should do next. He had been making some cocoa for her, and the cup was waiting for her on the hearth; but he did not remember to urge it on her now. All he remembered was that the fears which had haunted him in the midst of his happiness and triumph were beginning to be realized, and that in some way, at present hidden from him, he was losing his hold on Joan. So absent-minded was he that he did not know that he was still holding the lantern on high, as though the room were in darkness; and he directed its light on to that little motionless figure which crouched by the fire, dead to the outside world, dead to everything except some secret and inner prompting of mind and spirit.

At last he lowered the lantern, and blew it out. And then he left her.

CHAPTER IV

JOAN sat crouching by the fire long after it had gone out, and then suddenly becoming aware of intense fatigue and cold, threw herself down on the couch, gathered a rug over herself and fell immediately into a deep sleep of exhaustion, dreamless and motionless: that entire repose inevitably exacted by the body after a crisis of the spirit. Horace found her thus the next morning, did not attempt to rouse her, but lit the fire, prepared the coffee and went downstairs to fetch the milk, which was always left outside the enclosure, no villager nor even the farmer's boy being allowed to trespass on the sacred premises of the barn house itself.

When he returned, Joan was awake, and was lying staring before her, with her arms encircling her head. Her unconsciousness or disregard of his presence roused the devil in him. He darted up to her, caught hold of her right arm rather roughly and dragged it down from her head.

"Look here, Joan," he said, "there has been enough of this."

The next moment he was bitterly sorry for his roughness, and he said quickly:

"I'm ashamed of myself for having been so rough. But you're trying me beyond all bearing. What has happened to you? Why don't you speak and say something?"

Joan had risen. She did not seem frightened at his roughness, nor affected by his apology. Never had he been rough before, and one might have thought that she

would show surprise, or resentment, or some slight sign of fear or shrinking. Nothing of the kind. She looked at him quietly and not unkindly and said:

"I promise to try and tell you later, Horace. The trouble is that you'll never understand. How I wish you could."

Something in her calm, fearless manner silenced the retort which rose to his lips, and he was, moreover, ashamed of himself for having laid hands on her. So he left things as they were, and determined to wait until the usual hour when they would be working together at the history of the Renaissance. And during the interval he thought over the situation and changed his plan of action from one of anger to one of conciliation.

He put in the time by strolling over the moor and gathering some of the treasures Joan loved: bits of dead bracken, dead brown ling heather and bell heather and little clumps of bright emerald mosses. He brought them in, arranged them in a bowl and placed them on the study table. Then he opened one or two parcels of books containing several works of reference bearing on the Medici which Joan herself had insisted on ordering the previous week, and for which she had longed with an enthusiastic impatience both delightful and gratifying to him. There they were. A history of the Renaissance by a Professor Sluis of Utrecht; "Essays on the Italian Renaissance," by a poet, Jacob Searle; and "Savonarola and the Medici: a Modern Study," by G. F. Kirkby, an American Unitarian minister. He took a pen and wrote in each one *Joan*. He altered this to *My Little Joan*; and as he did this, a smile of tenderness came over his drawn face and some of the apprehension passed from his mind.

After all, she was his little Joan, his, and his only. He had fashioned her thoughts, guided her emotions, created her outlook. Even supposing for the sake of

argument, that she were to come under some hostile influence, it could not depreciate permanently the value of the work he had put into her education. He must not allow himself to be so insanely anxious for the future. If he were going to give way to nerveless terror of this sort, life would be nothing but a misery. Every one was liable to have curious moods, psychic seizures. The wonder was that Joan had had so few. None in fact that he could remember. Her docility of temperament and elasticity of brain sometimes struck him as rather awe-inspiring. Once he remembered distinctly asking himself whether he had any right to take advantage of such an unusual equipment just for the mere sake of indulging himself in an attempt at psychical creation. Yes, he remembered distinctly thinking that, and then he had dismissed the idea as ridiculous. It was ridiculous, of course. A little, ignorant girl, a blacksmith's daughter. What could she, unaided, have made of any raw materials of equipment? Nothing, of course. Where-as now . . .

The trap-door opened and Joan stepped up into the living-room.

She looked pale, but her eyes were bright with fearlessness, and her little form was rigid with determination. She came straight up to her desk side by side with his desk, and stood there for a moment. He stretched his arm out towards her in greeting. She did not respond to his movement, and slipped into her chair.

"Little one," he said, ignoring her unresponsiveness, "I have gathered mosses for you and some of the dead brown heather you love. Here they are as a sign of my penitence."

"No need for that, Horace," she said, "I know it."

"And here are the books for which you sent," he continued; "very interesting no doubt, but nothing like what

our book is going to be. Your book, I think I ought to say. I've written your name in all three volumes. They belong to you now, and I shall have to borrow them."

He bent over and put them on her desk.

"Thank you," she said, and she glanced towards him with eyes which did not see him.

And again the devil was roused in him. It maddened him that she should pretend to be unconscious of his presence and impervious to his influence. But this time he managed to control himself, and he went on:

"You know, Joan, I was very much struck last night by those passages you read from your notebook."

She gave her head a curious little jerk of alertness. She was looking hard at him now. He was himself going to make it easy for her to try and tell him something of that which was surging in her. He noticed at once that her interest was aroused and her attention secured, and it flashed through his brain that perhaps he had not praised her enough, and that here was his opportunity of making amends and of encouraging her with a generous acknowledgment of her share in the Renaissance book.

"I think it is remarkable the way you have got hold of the mind and meaning of Savonarola," he said. "Nothing could be better. I shall leave him entirely to you to work out. Those notes and passages of yours are invaluable. All of them. I should like to go carefully through them with you some day soon. But meanwhile I wish you'd read me again now what you read last night, will you?"

Joan got up and faced him.

"I can't, Horace," she said in a low voice, tense with suppressed meaning.

"You can't?" he repeated in a wondering tone. "And why not? What's the difficulty?"

"Because I've burnt them," she said. "Burnt them — every one of them."

He turned round in his chair, leaned one arm on his desk and the other on the arm of the chair, and fixed his eyes on the unflinching figure standing before him.

"You've burnt them," he said slowly, as if working out a problem.

"Yes," she said with sudden fierceness, "I burnt them because they were not me — because they were only you — only you — and nothing of me — your thoughts, your ideas, your opinions — nothing of me. I burnt them because I hate them."

"You burnt them because you hate them," he repeated with a deliberation which had danger in it; and the nervous twitch on his face betrayed the agitation which he was controlling with immense difficulty.

"I'm sick and tired of the whole thing," she said, flinging her arms over her head. "I'm tired of being a machine set in movement by you. I'm tired of being a parrot."

Once more the devil was roused in him. It maddened him that she should dare to defy him in this way, maddened him that his seven years of patient teaching should end in this result. Before he knew what he was doing, he had struck her a blow on the face.

She reeled a little, but recovered herself and held her ground. She was in such a curious condition of upliftment and detachment from ordinary circumstances, that it is possible she did not feel the full impact of his attack. Certainly she considered it unimportant as compared with what was going on in her mind.

"I knew by instinct that I could not explain to you," she said in a far-off voice. "I meant honestly to have tried. Lots of things I meant to try and tell you. And now you've made it impossible. I shall never tell you."

Never in my life. Not because you've hit me. But because you've shown by hitting me that you could not understand. That's the only thing that matters."

She left him stunned by the horror of his own violence and by the inscrutable way in which she had met it.

CHAPTER V

WILL BEAUDESART returned to his own little studio den in St. John's Wood and tried to forget the curious scene of which he had been a witness. It was difficult to say which of the two actors in the drama had made the most impression on his sensibility. He was knitted to his old friend Horace by the bonds of time-honored comradeship. But he was modern to his finger tips, and had no sympathy with or understanding of that ancient tradition which required woman to be a mere passive adjunct to man.

He shuddered more than once as he heard with his mind's ear little Joan giving vent to that mechanical Renaissance rapture. His sympathies were with her in what was obviously the beginning of a rebellion; but he tried to persuade himself that his real concern was about his old chum who had staked his all on this marriage adventure, in middle life, too, when experiments are not so easily discounted as mere passing phases of no permanent import. Yet it was Joan that haunted him the most persistently. So much so that once he threw his favorite pipe at her invading presence, and deeply offended Maria, the black cat, who naturally thought that the missile was aimed at her august and dignified person.

"No, it wasn't, old girl," Beaudesart reassured her. "I swear it wasn't. It was aimed at that little woman with her bright piercing eyes and movements like the unfettered grace of some young wild animal. Damn her, Maria! Why can't she keep to her own premises? She has got the whole of the Renaissance to herself. Look here, you shall have my cream, which I'd intended as a

treat for myself, with stewed prunes — a treat I'd looked forward to for centuries. Here it is, Maria. I offer it in propitiation at your shrine, reluctantly, but dutifully."

Maria was propitiated on this occasion, but there were other crises when even cream was incapable of coaxing her back into customary coziness, and when it seemed highly possible that the prophecies of the prehistoric were in real danger of being fulfilled and the home life of England was speeding to its doom of extinction. For Joan's presence was not easy to exorcise, either by a favorite pipe, a paint brush, a pallet, or a slipper. All these weapons of defense were in rotation thrown at her little eager face, and in vain.

It did not vanish. It looked always past him, beyond him. It was always out of reach. But there it was, in possession of the atmosphere. It would seem to have claimed the studio for its own precisely in the same way as most of Beaudesart's friends appropriated his home for their special haven. He was accustomed to that. He liked that. But in this instance, danger signals were flashed, and he knew he must heed them. He regretted his visit to Holbrook. It had certainly brought him neither peace nor happiness. He wished he had not yielded to the impulse to go and look up his old friend who had not given any sign of wishing to see him again. Bingham had been right when he said that the memory of an old friendship was far safer and far more stimulating than its renewal; and if he had not been in prison, no doubt he would have done his best to prevent Beaudesart from visiting Horace. And Mrs. Parflete, the autocrat of the newspaper and tobacco shop hard by, had said:

"Now, Mr. Beaudesart, don't give way to sentimental silliness. You just stop quietly at home and go on painting."

Poor old Eridge, too, who in spite of his wealth and

entirely absurd prosperity still knew a few truths of life, had been most emphatic in warning him not to seek out Holbrook. They had all been right, and he'd been a duffer. Well, the incident was over, and he added it to his long list of stupidities.

"A long list, Maria," he said. "But by no means complete, I am thankful to say. One would be dull if one were always sensible. However, that is not a danger lying in ambush for me."

It certainly was not. Judged by the world's standard of common sense, Will Beaudesart's life made but a poor showing. He was one of those who had been born with a few definite necessities of spirit, and to whom other things were not even superfluous, but simply non-existent. Wealth, social distinction and all the garish consequences of a successful career would never have had any meaning for him. It would never have been a temptation to him to sacrifice his ideals in art to a passion for gain. He saw many of his old friends and comrades prosperous and honored whilst he remained poor and of no consideration in the world of Art. But even if his kindly heart had been capable of envy, he could not have envied them. They were bondsmen, and he was free. He could still paint "the distant scene." They had put a prison wall between themselves and the vision beyond. They were the ones to be pitied; and sometimes they knew it themselves and came to lay their bereftness before him, perhaps with words, or perhaps in silence only. They loved and honored him for being able to keep what they themselves had lost, wholly or in part; and if he had failed them in unworldliness and disinterestedness, he would certainly have wrecked for them the inner citadel of their finest faith.

But there was never any fear of a disaster of this nature. The years went by and Beaudesart became if possible still more recklessly unworldly, always sitting lightly

to circumstance, always seeing and painting the distant scene, and always the friend and intimate of those who had thrown and lost in the game of life.

And a procession composed of the most queerly contrasted units continued to pass into his studio den, a procession lengthening with the lengthening years; for those who had led it off in the early days did not fall out and relinquish their place to new-comers. A heterogeneous company indeed, consisting of the rich, the poor, the so-called good, the so-called bad, the clever, the stupid, and all more or less on terms, including a barrister at law, an expert in criminology, obviously a dangerous person. Yet he appeared to be harmless enough there, smoking his pipe peacefully after a ruthless day in the Courts, or painting a meadow scene under Will's direction. Very keen on landscapes was Mr. Henry Hereford; and Will, who had known him from childhood, encouraged him in this innocent occupation, and gave up much time in helping and guiding him.

"It's my duty, old man," he said once when Hereford thanked him. "It's the bounden duty of the whole community to look after the souls of men like you always engaged in prosecutions for crime. No one shall ever touch your easel. It's sacred to you."

Hereford took offense and did not come for a long time. But one day when he had been particularly hateful to his victim in court, particularly vindictive, rude and ruthless, he suddenly thought of that unfinished landscape waiting on his own particular easel in Will's studio.

"My goodness," he said to himself, "I'm needing a dose of Will's studio to keep me human."

So back he went and was received once more into the fold without comment, and remained there supremely happy and entirely harmless but always a little on sufferance; for Will, whose heart was capacious enough to

keep a corner for the most doubtful of ticket-of-leavers, really was rather ashamed of having Hereford as an intimate. Moreover there were awkward moments, inconvenient crises, when some of his victims in the Courts recognized him and were apt to show signs of wishing "to go for him."

On these occasions Beaudesart invariably sent for Mrs. Mathilda Parflete. She straightened things out with an agreeable authoritativeness which restored peace and good-will to the community; and although she disliked Mr. Henry Hereford, she tried, as she said, to be just to him.

"As we can't have justice in the Courts, we must have it outside them," she said repeatedly. "Now do remember that."

They really did their best to remember, for they all looked up to Mrs. Parflete and took many of their difficulties and troubles and disappointments to her shop, which flourished under her direction as it had never been known to flourish before. Seven years ago — a few days after Holbrook had passed out of the life of the little community — she had arrived on the scene with her paralyzed old father, and by a few magical touches had turned a dreary, desolate little shanty into a cozy, cheerful, inviting house of call, where every one was made welcome and all the tobacco appeared to be in excellent condition and even the newspapers relatively truthful. As time went on and Beaudesart and his circle learnt to know her, they all took a great pride in the shop, and "minded" it for her sometimes when she wanted an hour or two off. Even Eridge, the prosperous, did his turn now and again, Bingham too, Beaudesart often, and others by fits and starts. And she, on her part, tried to look after her flock and to prevent them from being, as she put it, not more senseless than their natures demanded.

As for her common sense, they valued it as a sort of miraculous manifestation which at crises would save themselves, the State, the Empire, the world. Not that they were ever guided by it. But, as Beaudesart always said, the great thing was to know that it was there, a permanent asset for them all, like a fixed deposit at the Bank never to be touched in any circumstances whatever.

He came in to see her an afternoon or two after his visit to Horace Holbrook, and whilst smoking his pipe at the back of the counter, owned that he wished he had taken her advice and stayed at home.

"He didn't really care about seeing me," he said gloomily. "My visit was no pleasure to him and only upset me — upset me awfully."

"I don't think anything of that," she remarked cheerfully. "You were born to be upset, Mr. Beaudesart. You've got to fulfil your destiny, you know."

"Why don't you for once call me a fool for not having followed your advice?" he said. "That's what I am."

"Well, if you know it, there's no need for me to say it, is there?" she said in her good-natured way. "Besides, I don't ever expect any one to follow my advice. I've got brains enough for that."

Beaudesart laughed. And then he said:

"When I tell you the whole story of my visit, you'll understand that even a heaven-born idiot couldn't fail to see he'd made a mistake."

And he told her all the details and did not attempt to conceal the impression little Joan had made on him; for he was on those terms with Mrs. Parflete. He could tell her things.

"A little wild bird," he said. "And damn it, I can't get her out of my mind."

"You'll have to try, won't you?" Mrs. Parflete suggested.

"Yes, I suppose I shall have to try," he answered; "but it's going to be frightfully difficult."

"Fix your mind on your work," she said, "on all your queer pictures and your sunsets upside down and all those strange things you're doing which no one wants to buy. Start a new subject, and then you'll think and talk of nothing else for a few days. Won't that help you?"

He shook his head.

"Do you know," he said, "I'm so possessed by the thought of her, that I dash off studies of her, sketches of her, portraits of her. That's all I seem to want to do. I could do one now — and I bet you anything it would be absolutely true to life, Mrs. Parflete — no picture that any one who had known her for years could paint, could be truer. Because, you see, there she is before me the whole time — she's here now, in this very shop. Upon my soul, I wonder you don't see her yourself. There she is — the little wild bird that I can't forget."

"It seems to me," said Mrs. Parflete, "that you'll get yourself into a nice muddle if you're not careful. What do you suppose Mr. Holbrook will say if he comes along and sees all those pictures of his wife? He won't exactly love it, will he?"

"He's not likely to come along," Beaudesart said stubbornly. "He hasn't entered my studio for seven years."

"All the more reason he should come now," she said. "Haven't you better burn them? Of course you won't. I know that. But you ought to."

"Of course I ought to," he said. "But I can't. I simply can't."

Mrs. Parflete made no further comment. She attended to her customers, served them with shag or tobacco or evening papers, and as usual sent them off con-

tent with herself, with themselves and with their respective purchases. Papers and tobacco dispensed by her took on a sort of glamour which transformed the commonest tobacco into the rarest blend, and the papers into truthful, really truthful, official pronouncements. She did not aim at this miraculous effect. It came of its own accord, and was a valuable asset to that little shop.

After she had parted thus pleasantly with the last of rather a long procession of customers, she ran off for a moment to see her paralyzed old father in the adjoining little room, and when she returned, she found Beaudesart still sitting huddled up in his usual chair behind the counter, smoking his pipe in listless fashion.

"Still seeing visions of that little wild bird?" she asked.

"Yes, still seeing visions of that little wild bird," he answered.

"It's a pity Mr. Bingham isn't out of prison," she said. "You'd soon cheer up and pull yourself together if you had him with you."

"He'll soon be out," Beaudesart said. "Poor old chap. I long to see him and hear his clarionet again."

"Yes, you've always said, haven't you, that his clarionet puts everything right for you," she said kindly.

"Yes," Beaudesart said. "Bingham's splendid . . . and you hear it in his music."

"Well, I hope they'll let him out before his time," she said. "You need some one for company more human than Mr. Hereford. He is not human at all. Though I maintain he's harmless enough outside the Courts."

Beaudesart smiled.

"You've always rather hated him, haven't you? And yet you're just to him."

"That's when we've got to be just — when we hate," she answered. "And very horrid it is, too, isn't it?"

Beaudesart relapsed into a reverie, and Mrs. Parflete took up an evening paper and glanced at it with unseeing eyes; for she did not really want to read it. For one thing she had no opinion of evening papers. Her secret belief was that they only existed to be contradicted comfortably by the morning ones; and so she generally left it to the poor deluded public to learn and unlearn the "latest intelligence." But also Beaudesart's account of his visit to Holbrook's home had greatly interested and stirred her, and she could not think of anything else. She always sympathized with rebellion. The papers she liked best, though she didn't say so, were the daring and defiant ones which generally perished in their rebellion. And her feminine curiosity, too, was roused by witnessing the deep impression which Mrs. Holbrook had made on Beaudesart. She wanted to hear the whole story all over again; and when she asked him to repeat it, he was only too glad to have the chance of another outpouring. At the end she said:

"Of course Mrs. Holbrook will leave her husband soon. That's quite certain. No woman is going to stand being mewed up like that nowadays. She'll leave him, and it will serve him right. I don't pity him. He seems to have used up all his brains for that history of his, and got none left for his domestic life. He has even less sense than you, Mr. Beaudesart."

Beaudesart took his pipe from his mouth.

"Leave him — will she?" he said excitedly.

"I'm sure of it," Mrs. Parflete answered. "Of course she will — eventually."

"But where would she go?" he said. "What could she do? She knows no one. He has cut her off completely from every one. He told me so himself. Why, I'm certainly the only outside person she has seen for months and months. Where would she go?"

"I couldn't tell you," Mrs. Parflete said. "All I

know is that once roused, she'll never stay on as if nothing had happened. Who could? She'll leave him, and work out her freedom in her own way."

"By Jove, by Jove, leave him, will she?" he exclaimed.

And he kept on saying it at intervals, half to himself, until he was interrupted by the arrival of Eminent Counsel, who called in on his way to the studio to buy an evening paper. For although Mr. Henry Hereford did not like Mrs. Parflete any more than she liked him, he would not have dreamed, if he were in the neighborhood, of buying his evening paper from any one else. But she was never able to cast any glamour over anything she sold to him. And he was never able to fix her with his little gimlet eyes. Never once had he intimidated her. She was always equal to him, and she was equal to him to-night when he was obviously in one of his Central Criminal Court moods.

"A *Westminster*," he said truculently, as if he were accentuating some point in the prosecution which would lead to a charge of murder.

"Sold out," she answered as if demolishing a statement.

"A *Star*, then," he said with slight irritation.

"Also sold out," she answered, pleased to thwart him.

And then with a twinkle in her eye, she added:

"But here's a copy of *Justice* left, Mr. Hereford. Try that."

He gave her a severe glance before which she did not quail.

"You know I never read that paper," he said, frowning. "You know that perfectly."

Beaudesart laughed. He was always amused when Mrs. Parflete had a dig at her enemy.

"Hello, wait for me," he called out cheerily as Hereford was hurrying out of the shop. "Hold hard, I'm

coming along now, this moment. I say, can't you come too, Mrs. Parflete? That electric cooker which Eridge has given me was fixed up this morning, and I'm scared at the confounded thing. But I'm going to try it all the same. Can't you come and prevent us from being electrocuted? That will be our sure fate if I'm left alone to manage it unaided; for Hereford, as we know, is no good at anything except bullying in a Court of Justice, is he? Whereas you would be ready for any crisis. You'd stand no nonsense from the electric cooker or any old thing, would you?"

She laughed.

"You're right," she said. "I'd manage the electric cooker somehow. I'd stand no nonsense from it. I have no more fear of it than I have of Mr. Hereford's little gimlet eyes! It does amuse me when he tries to pierce me with them! But I can't come to-night. I'll look in to-morrow, instead."

Beaudeart nodded and passed out, but had scarcely gone, when he returned.

"I say," he said a little sheepishly, "what makes you think she will leave him?"

"Common sense," Mrs. Parflete answered abruptly.

He lingered a moment longer.

"I suppose I ought to try and burn those pictures of her," he said wistfully. "I know I ought to."

She made no comment. But after he had gone, she sat for a long time thinking of him.

"Born to be upset," she said aloud. "Born to be dragged into every one's troubles and to get nothing in compensation. I shouldn't wonder if that little woman comes to him — simply because she has no one else to go to. I'm glad I didn't say it. It was on my lips, though — and in his heart."

CHAPTER VI

THAT same morning after Horace had struck her, Joan, very quietly and without any preliminaries, left her home. She had a pound or two in her purse and she put a little bread and cheese and some sticks of chocolate in her wallet, and armed with her favorite stick, in company with which she had trudged many a mile over the moors, she set off on an expedition from which she did not intend to return. No one from her appearance and behavior would have thought she was bent on anything except an ordinary ramble on a fine day. But all the same, she was exceedingly excited and elated. She felt like a wild bird, which had been caged but now was free once more, free as air; and so great was her enjoyment of this freedom, that her mind did not dwell on the step she was taking, nor on the alarm she would be causing her husband, nor on the causes which were impelling her to go forth dauntlessly from her prison boundaries.

She was not in the least angry with Horace. For the moment she was not enough interested in him to be angry. He did not count. What counted was her fiercely eager determination to find herself, be herself and express herself in her own way. No fears nor doubts of any kind assailed her. And in any case fear was unknown to little Joan. The thought, indeed, uppermost in her mind was that anything which might happen to her could not fail to be better than nothing happening to her except the events of the Italian Renaissance. If she had any animus at all, it was directed against such personages as the Visconti of Milan, the

Baglioni of Perugia, the D'Estes of Ferrara, Piero and Lorenzo dei Medici, the Borgias, Savonarola and others.

"Savonarola is the most importunate of them all," she said with a laugh, half angry, half humorous. "He must be got rid of at all costs. I shan't have the barest chance if he is going to crop up unasked at any moment. But if he goes, all the others go, for he is the one to whom I've given most time and attention. Why did I do it? Oh, simply because I've been under a spell and did not know what I was doing. But now that I do know, I am going to alter all that."

And as she tramped over the moor, she was stimulated and impelled by this one prompting. She was going to find her own path. Nothing mattered except that. It did not matter much where she went, since all paths led to the land for which she was making, that abstract land of no geographical limits, where the mind can roam unfettered, where it can choose its own track and pursue it or abandon it, and reach its destination unimpeded save by chance circumstance. Since it did not matter where she went, she chose by natural instinct her old home to which her thoughts had been turned once more with such tender yearning. It was a little village about forty miles away on the other side of Z—— and of course she could have gone nearly all the way by train. But it didn't even occur to her to do this. No, what she needed was the freedom to rove at her own will, at her own time, like any other young wild animal, now with bounding steps and now with lingering laziness, now alert and now unwary, and always joyous, because free.

When dusk came, she began to feel tired, and when she passed near a fine old barn adjacent to a farmhouse, she determined to take a rest. She tried the door, found it unlocked, crept into the barn, lay down on some sacks of corn in the ear and fell fast asleep. A little later, some one came and locked the door; but Joan knew noth-

ing of that. She awoke in the middle of the night, wondered where she was, remembered, smiled and again fell fast asleep without one disturbing thought. Voices roused her the next morning, and starting up, she saw a farm laborer and a very handsome woman with raven black hair standing looking at her.

She jumped up, and faced them without flinching.

"Oh, what a good night I've had," she cried impulsively. "I've not slept so well for years."

"Is that all you have to say for having trespassed on my premises?" the woman said not unkindly.

"What ought I to say?" Joan asked. "That I am sorry? But I'm not sorry. How could I be sorry to sleep dreamlessly in this wonderful old barn, as large and beautiful as a cathedral? No, I'm by no means sorry. But if I've done wrong, of course I'm ready to pay the penalty. That's another matter."

The woman smiled. Something in the small, alert, defiant intruder appealed both to her capacity for amusement and to something whimsical in her nature.

"There is a tremendously heavy penalty attached to this adventure," she said with a twinkle in her eye. "The penalty of breakfast. All tramps discovered here are liable to that punishment, especially if they look dangerous. As you certainly appear to belong to that category, please follow me instantly unless you'd like me to call in the policeman or the sheriff, or some other absurd official."

She laughed a little soft laugh as she glanced again at Joan, who with her wallet and stick, her simplicity of attire and air of detachment looked entirely unaccountable, it is true, but certainly not dangerous. She did not seem, however, to be in the least curious about her unexpected guest and she put no questions to her. She signed to her to follow, and with a lazy gracefulness led the way through a pretty orchard to the back of the farm-

house and opened a door into a little sunny room, white-washed, with a blue shelf filled with books.

"If you bring the tramps here for punishment, I imagine you don't get rid of them easily," Joan said.

"This is not the usual tramps' room," the woman answered. "It is a room kept for dangerous people like yourself, you know! You can take your breakfast here. I will have it sent to you."

"It is very good of you," Joan said. "But, you know, I have some food in my wallet. Look here. I have cheese and bread and chocolate. What more could any explorer want?"

"I will return shortly," the woman said, taking no notice of her words. "I must just go and look after a guinea-fowl that is ill. Your breakfast will be sent in to you."

And it was. About ten minutes afterwards an old servant, grumbling a good deal and muttering something about being tired of tramps and fads and all such nonsense, arrived with a tray of tea, bread, butter and eggs. Joan went forward to relieve her of the tray and nearly dropped it in the attempt.

"Why, it's Keturah!" she cried excitedly. "Dear, dear old Keturah! You know me, don't you — Joan, the blacksmith's daughter."

"Know ye — of course I know ye!" the old woman said, looking at her. And the next moment she had folded little Joan in her arms.

"Little Joan, little Joan," she crooned. "Many a time I've nursed my lambkin, haven't I?"

Then she loosened hold of her suddenly, as if angry with her.

"Ah, they're all gone, lambkin," she said. "Ye never came back again to see them. Never a one time. And they fretted. Why didn't ye come?"

Joan covered her face with her hands.

"I could not come, Keturah," she said in a low voice. "I wasn't free."

And she added:

"I'm on my way home now. I became free yesterday. And my first thought was to go home."

"But what's the use of going now they're dead?" Keturah said. "Here, eat your breakfast, child."

Joan pushed the cup aside.

"I longed to see even the place, Keturah," she said.

"There isn't the place any more," the old woman said.

"The smithy was burnt down, and the cottage too."

"The smithy burnt down," Joan repeated. "And I hungered to see it."

"Have ye only been free to go when your husband died?" Keturah asked.

"He has not died," Joan said with a start; and for the first time since she had left home, her thoughts returned to Horace.

"Then it's true, my lambkin, that he wouldn't let ye go?" the old woman asked. "It's true, is it, that he's been cruel to ye?"

"No, no, never cruel," Joan said staunchly. "Never, never cruel. But I think I've been sort of bewitched by him, Keturah, and by things that concerned him — until yesterday. And yesterday — only yesterday — think of it — I got free. And I at once left him."

Keturah scowled.

"Had he got another woman?" she asked abruptly. "Did he put that shame on ye?"

"Oh, no, no," Joan answered. "Nothing of the sort. Nothing of the sort. We've been very happy together. He has always been kind to me."

"Never struck ye?" Keturah insisted. "Never once?"

"*Never once*," rang out Joan's voice like a clear bell. "But I was not free."

"But who is free, my lamb?" old Keturah said. "I've found that out in a long life."

"Oh, I can't explain," Joan said gently, for Keturah's ready championship and anxious concern touched her to the heart.

A troubled expression came over the old woman's wrinkled face.

"Now don't tell me ye've found another man," she said with trembling voice. "Don't tell me ye've put that shame on him. Answer me that as if to your own mother."

"Well, I can tell you honestly that I've found no other man," Joan said gaily. "If that's my last word, it is the truth, Keturah."

At that moment the woman with the raven hair reappeared on the scenes. Keturah, who did not seem to like her, frowned and grumbled out something about not having minded for once waiting on a tramp since this was a tramp she'd known from babyhood.

"Though why she's on the road, I don't know," she finished up with, as she left the room.

"Why is any one anywhere, I should like to know?" Joan's hostess said, sitting down and lighting a cigarette. "Do you smoke, by the way?"

Joan shook her head.

"No, I don't smoke," she said, but she watched her companion with keen interest.

"The guinea-fowl is dead," the other went on after a puff or two. "That is the fourth I've lost lately. Certainly I'm no genius at rearing poultry. And Keturah takes no trouble. Partly out of spite, I think. She resents my presence here. Her manner is not consoling, is it? If you know her well, I do wish you could induce her to be less disagreeable."

"But you are the mistress here, aren't you?" Joan said.

"Heaven forbid," she answered. "I'm in charge only. A sort of intermittent caretaker, spending week-ends here from time to time and keeping an eye on things whilst the owners, my friends, are away in South Africa."

"You are very beautiful," Joan said involuntarily. "And I have never seen such raven black hair."

"Well, I can't pretend it isn't much admired," she said with a laugh. "Some men . . ."

She broke off and shrugged her shoulders a little uneasily. Joan's bright eyes seemed to be searching into her, unconsciously, it is true, yet incisively.

She added quickly, as if to change the conversation:

"And so grim old Keturah and you are acquainted. I call that very odd."

"It isn't really odd," Joan said. "You see, I'm on my way to my old home which isn't more than twenty-five miles from here. Keturah has always lived in these parts. She was my mother's friend. And when I left home to be married, she . . ."

"Married, are you?" interposed the other. "Oh, yes, I see the symbol of servitude."

Joan looked at her ring and said with sudden fierceness:

"Yes, it is servitude."

And the renewed recollection and realization of that servitude prompted her to delay no more in putting a longer distance between herself and her husband's home. She started up and snatched her wallet and stick.

"Don't go, for Heaven's sake!" the raven-haired woman exclaimed. "I don't know who you are or what you are doing. And I'm not in the least curious. The point is that I'm bored to extinction, and your mysterious arrival is a Godsend. At least stop a few hours to oblige me. I'm tired of the companionship of dearest Keturah, and I'm sick of books. Absolutely sick of them."

"So am I," Joan said with intensity. "I want people, not books. Real, living people of the present day."

"You *are* intense, you little thing," the other said. "Why, you are charged with electricity."

"Real, living people of the present day," Joan repeated. "No one from history — and certainly not from the Italian Renaissance. I've done with that for ever more."

"Well, I'm a real, living person of the present day," the other said. "You can begin with me — Rachel Thorne. And I'm quite safe as far as the Italian Renaissance goes. I know nothing about it and have no secret leanings and ambitions in that direction. You can put down your wallet and your stick, in entire confidence."

Joan put them down. She was not sorry to linger awhile. She was interested in this experience and delighted to have a new kind of companionship. She had been brought in contact with so few people since her marriage, that the mere fact of speaking to a stranger made her feel that the possibilities of her new and free life had begun in earnest. And this woman attracted her. She was indeed attractive, both by reason of her beautiful presence and her ease of manner with its whimsical, irresponsible casualness not unmixed with kindness. So Joan willingly enough decided to remain.

"I'll gladly stay a little," she said with a smile. "I'd love to."

"That's right," Rachel Thorne said. "You are really doing a charitable action. You are the first tramp whom I have hungered to detain. They are not detainable as a rule, I can assure you!"

Joan laughed.

"There was one man whom I almost detained," Rachel Thorne said. "I have an idea that he was a broken-down actor. But Keturah bundled him off unceremoniously whilst I went upstairs to fetch some money for

him — poor actor-man. Keturah invariably interferes with my amusements — when she can — that is to say. Now, you see, she'll be coming soon to try and get you away from here."

Even as she spoke, the door opened and Keturah's head appeared:

"My lambkin not gone," she said gravely. And without another word she withdrew.

"There, now, I told you," the other said, with a good-natured smile. "But it's natural enough. Before I came, she had the whole atmosphere to herself, guinea-fowls, tramps and all. And now she can't share them with any one. She prefers to let the guinea-fowls die and to chivy the tramps away. If I had not myself found you this morning, most likely I should never have heard that a little stranger woman, with keen, keen eyes, charged with electricity and armed with a wallet and a stick, had slept the night in our barn and had had no dreams — not even of the Italian Renaissance. I should have been sorry."

"And so should I," Joan said eagerly.

And she added:

"No, not a single dream of the Renaissance. Not a single vision of César Borgia, Lorenzo dei Medici, Savonarola, or any of the Sforzas. You can't know what that means to me."

"No, I'm sure I can't," Rachel Thorne said. "But they do sound snuffy and appalling old bores."

"Not a single dream," Joan went on, leaning back and putting her clasped hands over her head. "And then, you know, I woke up in the middle of the night, wondered where I was, remembered, could have laughed from glee if I had not been so sleepy, and after a minute or two fell fast asleep again. But I shall never forget what I felt like in those few seconds of consciousness. I felt I had come into a kingdom of my own which I

had found myself, mind you, no one having told me where to look for it. That's the whole point. A land where I could at least have the chance of being myself—not some one else—but myself—a senseless, foolish person no doubt, but at least unfettered by other minds. I shall never be freer than I was then. It was really a thrilling moment.”

She unclasped her hands and stretched her arms out towards the ceiling. There was a curious look of rapture on her face. Her companion, who was on the point of lighting another cigarette, paused instead and scanned her thoughtfully.

“Yes, little wild bird,” she said, “if one cares for freedom as you appear to care, it must have been a thrilling moment.”

“As often as I recall it,” Joan said, “I shall always see with my mind's eye the splendid rafters of the barn and a moonbeam which lit up the sacks of corn opposite me.”

“And you were not afraid?” asked Rachel Thorne. “Not nervous at all?”

Joan, who had now come out of her rapture, laughed a joyous little laugh which had in it all the freshness of a May morning.

“Afraid,” she repeated. “Of course not! 'Afraid of possibilities—never!’”

The little figure drew itself up unconsciously to its fullest and proudest height, and gave Rachel Thorne the distinct impression of being ready for all possibilities and impossibilities.

“You little thing,” she said, admiringly, but with a tone of wistfulness in her voice, “I believe you're the type of woman that has a world of courage in her. I've always admired that type. Now I'm just the reverse. I'm an entire coward, mentally and physically. If I'd had any fight in me, I should . . .”

She broke off.

"Well, that's neither here nor there," she added, throwing the end of her cigarette into the tea-cup. "Look here, if you've finished breakfast, do come and look at the seven remaining guinea-fowls and tell me whether you think they too are qualifying for an early death. Or persuade Keturah to take an interest in them, out of love for you. You see, I've got them on the brain. They were put in my special charge. My friends had a ridiculous regard for them, as if they were rare and rich — 'like the jewels she wore,' you know! And they are perishing at an alarming rate. But most things do perish when entrusted to my care. Now just wait a minute whilst I go upstairs to fish out some sacred directions about them which I've been too lazy to unearth all this time. I won't be long. There are books on the shelf, if you want any. Ah, but I forgot, you're tired of them, and I don't wonder."

She had not been gone a minute before Keturah came to the door and beckoned to Joan.

"Come, my lamb," she said. "Come and help me peel the potatoes. Don't stay with that horrid creature. I can't abide her."

"Oh, but, Keturah, she is not a horrid creature," Joan said. "I don't know who she is any more than she knows who I am. But I like her. And she's so beautiful. And good-natured, too. Why don't you help her to look after the guinea-fowls? You might, really. Do, Keturah."

"*Never*," said Keturah rigidly. And Joan laughed and put her arm through that of the old woman.

"That's exactly as you used to say 'never' when father used to tease you and want you to lift the horses' feet for him," she said. "Do you remember, Keturah?"

"Yes, yes, I remember, lambkin," the old woman an-

swered, a soft expression coming over her grim face. "He was a cheery soul, your father was. And proud of his wee girl. The pride of the forge, he used to call ye. I remember that well, too."

Joan closed her eyes.

"Don't stay any longer, my lamb," Keturah urged. "Go away. This is no place for ye. And the creature here is no friend for ye. If she wants ye to stay, it's only because she wants company. Only for herself, always for herself. She'd turn my lambkin off in a minute if anything she liked better cropped up. If that man of hers was to come, she'd soon send ye to the right-about. If ye're not going back to your own home, then go back to the old village. But don't ye stay here. Wouldn't my old heart love to have ye here? No, no, I want ye to go. That's what I . . ."

"But the smithy is burnt down," Joan put in. "You said so yourself."

"The smithy is burnt down and the dear ones are gone; but there are the graves in the churchyard," Keturah said solemnly. "And good people in the village who'll hold out their hands. Go, lambkin. Take your hat and your little bag and stick and be off before the horrid creature comes down."

But Joan shook her head.

"No," she said doggedly. "I don't want to hurry off. I shan't hurry off."

The door opened and Rachel Thorne appeared, waving a piece of paper triumphantly in one hand and holding a book in the other.

"There, now, I've found the precious document," she said. "So if Keturah hasn't relented about the guinea-fowls, we shall be able to do without her. Have you relented, Keturah?"

"Never," answered the old woman.

Rachel shrugged her shoulders, intimating that efforts at propitiation were futile, and that the only thing to do was to ignore the enemy.

"Come along," she said to Joan cheerily. "We'll study the directions together, and also this tome. Don't shy at it because it is a book. It's only a poultry book. But I've never had the pluck to tackle it alone. Suppose we take these two camp stools. Then we can sit in front of the run and contemplate the invalids at our ease. No, you can't carry them both. Give me one. That's right. And now follow me through the orchard."

Keturah heard them laughing as they trudged off together like old acquaintances.

"Perhaps I'm hard on her," she muttered to herself; and she stood for a moment watching the two strangely assorted companions, and half wondering whether she would not follow them and tell them ungrudgingly all she knew about guinea-fowls. She was still irresolute when the horn of a motor sounded on the road. The machine came dashing along and slowed down at the garden gate. A man of a type both coarse and garish jumped out and gave the chauffeur instructions to wait.

He hurried up the pathway and knocked rather impatiently at the door; but when old Keturah arrived on the scene, his manner was both kindly and considerate.

"Sorry to have flustered you, Keturah," he said, "but I've only a short time to spare, and I've just looked in to see Miss Thorne for a moment."

"She's out there," Keturah said, pointing in the direction of the guinea-fowl run.

"Alone, of course," he said.

"No, she's not alone," Keturah said rather spitefully.

"Not alone," he said, frowning. "What does this mean?" And he went off immediately and came upon the two camp stools with their occupants, who were so immersed in the poultry book that they did not hear him

at first. He was evidently much amused at what he saw, for he had a quiet little laugh all to himself.

"What a sell for me," he said aloud; and then he paused a moment.

"Rachel," he called out good-naturedly, "what the devil are you doing here?"

She looked up and saw him, and a complete transformation came over her. Joan could not have believed that such a change could take place. Her face, which was by nature rather pale, had flushed crimson with anger and her eyes were aflame with indignation.

"How dare you come like this," she said. "A surprise visit, I suppose. To spy on me, in fact. To see what I was doing. Oh, I know. You needn't deny it."

"Oh, come, come, Rachel," he said coaxingly. "You needn't take it like that. After all, it's I who have been made a fool of, isn't it? Look here, I've brought something for you — something you'll like fearfully — a black pearl — here it is, my dear girl — open the case yourself — and see what a beautiful thing you'll find inside — come, come now — you can't say I haven't been thinking of you, can you?"

He put the little case in her hands, but before he could prevent her, she had flung it into the guinea-fowl run, without even vouchsafing to look at it.

"That's what I think of your surprise visit and your black pearl," she said fiercely.

She turned on her heel and hastened towards the farmhouse, leaving Sebert Renshaw and Joan in an equal state of stupefaction, though from vastly different causes. The man was furious with his mistress, but chiefly anxious how to propitiate her; and Joan was recalling old Keturah's words of warning and understanding them at last.

It was she who first recovered herself. She made a sudden raid on the guinea-fowl run, secured possession

of the case, which had already been mercilessly picked up by the flustered birds, and gave it back to Sebert Renshaw.

"Thank you," he said, stuffing it rather shamefacedly into his waistcoat pocket.

"A good thing they didn't succeed in opening it," she said. "They would have made short work of the black pearl."

A twinkle came into her eye and she laughed, as if from some merry recollection and added:

"But perhaps it would have aided their recovery better than any of the puzzling prescriptions in the poultry book. Perhaps that is what she intended. Please tell her I made that remark, will you?"

"Certainly I will, if you wish," he said, with a puzzled smile. "But won't you tell her yourself?"

"I am not coming back to the house," Joan said. "But I want you to tell the raven-haired woman from me that I shall never forget her nor her kindness. And will you also tell Keturah with my love that I have gone to my old home?"

"I will bear your message faithfully," he said, watching her as she put on her hat and strung on her wallet. "And look here, I am awfully sorry this has happened. I don't know how to apologize for having caused this scene in your presence. Upon my word, I'm distressed about it."

She said nothing, but it was obvious that she shrank from him. He flushed a little and said:

"I see you're walking. Wouldn't you like my motor car to take you a mile or two?"

"No," she answered abruptly. "Certainly not."

Then she started off on her journey, full of many thoughts and deeply interested in weighing the experiences which had befallen her. She had been walking

perhaps for half an hour when a motor overtook her, and a voice called out :

“ You little thing, stop ! ”

The woman with the raven hair leaned out of the car. She was alone.

“ I got your message,” she said, “ and laughed till the tears ran down my cheeks. Poor guinea-fowls, they never get a chance, do they? Well, I couldn’t let you go off without saying good-by. And here’s my name and the address of my club in London. If I could be of any use some time or other, you could write, you see. But perhaps you wouldn’t even want to do that now you know why — why Keturah dislikes me.”

“ Yes, I would,” Joan said staunchly.

“ Thank you,” she said gently. “ Good luck to you.”

She signed the chauffeur to turn back. Joan stood watching the car until it had disappeared in the distance.

CHAPTER VII

JOAN'S acceptance of Rachel Thorne was due not only to a naturally uncritical spirit, but also to the fact that her chief feeling at this time was the immense overpowering relief at starting on her own account. It was no concern of hers that this beautiful woman with the raven black hair was that horrid man's mistress. Joan realized it quite well and left it at that. With regard to the man himself, what impressed her chiefly was the entire difference between his type and that of Horace. But here again it was no concern of hers what or who he was, except when he offered her a slight service which her instinct prompted her to reject. Her mind glided past the details and focussed only on the interest of the experience, on the sheer delight of coming in contact with living people of the present day, no matter who they chanced to be or what they happened to be doing.

She would probably have wanted to analyze them and sum up their characters and motives if she had got them caged in the Renaissance, for instance, or any other period on which her brain had been trained to dwell. But out of history, they were free-lances, privileged, irresponsible beings, whom she was only too glad to meet on any terms, their own terms, not hers. So that as she passed on her way, her whole being was stimulated by the remembrance of companionship not imperilled by criticism.

She was extraordinarily happy; and fears and anxieties for the future touched her not at all. Remorse for having left Horace did not once assail her. Not once

was she troubled with the thought that he would be expecting her to return, searching for her, worrying about her. Not once did she picture him as lonely, desolate, despairing. And if such a vision had arisen, she probably would not have cared, could not have cared: since, in its early stages, escape from circumstances necessarily implies a certain amount of ruthlessness and cold callousness, unconscious, not deliberate. Nothing, therefore, intervened to spoil for Joan this wonderful time of immunity from all feelings except the rapture of freedom and the joy of the wide world now stretching before her.

She tramped happily along the road, resting a little by the wayside now and then, but always glad to be on her feet again, and increasingly keen on seeing her old home. But when nightfall came, she was still about ten miles off the little village of T——, for which she was heading, and she found shelter this time in a shed, curled up most comfortably in a cart half full of great bundles of willow branches.

She ate her last piece of bread and cheese and some oatcakes which Keturah had apparently sneaked into the wallet, and fell asleep almost immediately, with a smile of contentment on her face. The night held no dread for her: for a child of nature was but claiming her birthright of peaceful carelessness.

It was early morning when she awoke, and she passed on her way long before the laborers were beginning the day's toil. She knew the short cut now to T——, and forsook the high road for a green stretch of moorland, at the further end of which was the little village where she had been born and bred. Forty miles only from the place to which her husband had taken her. And yet it might have been forty thousand, so completely had she been cut off from all access to it.

This fact dawned on her as it had never dawned be-

fore; and for the first time since she had battled with herself on that wild night in that wild raging windstorm, a fierce anger against Horace took possession of her, *and she hated him*. She hated him for the power he had wielded over her to make her care only for him, think only of him and turn from those who had been dear to her all her young life until he had laid his spell on her. But what about herself? What about her own will power? Directly she faced that question, it was against herself that her anger became directed; and Horace was again relegated to that unimportant remoteness, the sense of which had roused the devil in him.

But now some other emotions began to claim little Joan. The fierceness in her heart was tempered by happy memories and recollections of childhood. Old landmarks caught her eager eye. There were the two windmills yonder, called always *The Twins*, and to the left lay that huge barn of Farmer Jackson's known always as *Never ending*, where in the past frolics used to take place and the fiddler fiddled until his bow arm nearly came off. And down to the right was the river, a mere silver thread now shining in the sunshine. But in the rainy season, didn't it just know how to flood those low-lying fields! Off she sped to it and washed and refreshed herself in it, to her heart's content. She was ravenously hungry now and finished off her remaining provisions without one apprehensive thought.

When she was within a mile of T—— she met a flock of sheep driven by Old Jacob, Farmer Jackson's shepherd. He and she had been firm friends and allies, and many an hour had she spent minding the sheep with him and hearing from him many secrets of sheep lore. She stopped him now, clutching his arm in her old childlike way.

"Old Jacob," she cried, and that was all she could find words to say.

He knew her at once, and his rugged face lit up with a smile.

"Why, Joan, my lass, have ye come back at last to help me mind the sheep?" he said. "Aye, but I've missed ye. A long while ye've kept us waiting, my lass, all of us — and they that's dead and gone."

"Yes, I know, Old Jacob," she said. And she hung her head.

"Cheer up, my little lamb," he said kindly. "Folk have to find their own sheep track. But when they come back to the fold, the old shepherd's waiting for them — he's there, if there's no one else."

"I'm going to their graves, Old Jacob," she said.

He nodded.

"Aye," he said. "Near the cedar tree ye'll find them, my lass."

And there she found them. She had gone to the churchyard half dreading the emotions which were likely to overcome her; but almost to her own relief she found that the mere sight of the graves had no stirring effect on her. No regrets, no longings assailed her there, for the simple reason that she had met and felt the presences of her so-called dead in the hour of her need and remorse on the lonely moor. The true and only communion had begun between them on the basis of a larger knowledge on both sides, a finer union, a keener intuition. The grave but recorded the vanishing of their physical presences. The meeting on the moors revealed the secret of their spiritual nearness: a secret once disclosed, always, for ever more. As she stood by the cedar tree, it flashed across her mind that she owed this outlook to Horace. She heard his voice saying, "*The so-called dead of the previous ages.*" She remembered wondering at his words when she first heard them, wondering timidly and in silence, and accepting them as a matter of course because they *were* his words. But now she knew them to be true.

For the first time since her revolt she had a pang — it was a pang — of gratitude to him for something she had learnt from him.

"If he took me away from them, he has at least shown me how to find them again," Joan said aloud. "And not here."

She turned aside, tearless but deeply thoughtful, and saw a young woman watching her closely. Joan was on the point of resenting this inspection, when she suddenly recognized her old school friend, Lizzy Gifford, the washerwoman's daughter. She was dressed in a cheap imitation of the fashion, and looked much less refined and attractive than in the old days; but the small, round, winsome face still sent out its appeal which could not be resisted; and Joan felt a thrill at seeing an old playmate again.

"I thought I was not mistook," Lizzy said. "I thought it was Joan herself."

And she added, with a half-disparaging glance at Joan's simple attire:

"But don't say, honey, that things have gone bad with ye."

"No, no, they've gone well, splendidly," Joan said with a smile. "I suppose I look like a tramp, Lizzy. Well, I am one. I've tramped nearly fifty miles."

"But why didn't you come by the train?" Lizzy asked. "Fancy walking all that way."

"I wanted to walk," Joan said. "I had a great desire to walk miles and miles and miles."

"Well, you was always a queer little one," Lizzy said indulgently, putting her arm through that of Joan. "But come along now to mother and tell us all about yourself. You've been long enough by the graveside. I watched you a long while, but didn't like to worry you when you were thinking of the old folk you've lost."

"I haven't lost them," Joan said.

"Haven't lost them?" Lizzy repeated. "No, of course you'll see them in heaven some day, won't you? A nice tombstone, isn't it, Joan? Fine—I call it."

Joan made no answer. She thought the cross and anchor entirely hideous and inappropriate, and the words chosen both for her mother and father not even remotely applicable. But instinct told her to be silent. So she glanced once more at the grave with eyes which looked beyond it, turned from it with something like relief, and strolled along with Lizz, who poured out a stream of chatter which interested and arrested Joan, though at the same time it bewildered her. Only one point was clear to Joan, and this was that Lizz pitied her for wearing no fine clothes and no jewelry.

"Your husband hasn't been over generous to you, I'm thinking," she said not spitefully, but in real concern.

"Oh, but he has," Joan answered eagerly. "You should see the books he has given me."

"Books!" laughed Lizz. "Well, I never! What good are books, I should like to know?"

Joan laughed too. She laughed at Lizz for her honest disdain, and at herself for putting a renewed value on possessions of which she was thoroughly tired.

"But after all," she reflected, "one can't get rid of a habit in a few days. I shall probably have several relapses."

When she reached Mrs. Gifford's cottage she felt that she could not go in until she had at least seen the site of her old home; and she hurried away suddenly, leaving Lizz to give the news of her return. She crossed the village green, passed the three large elm trees by the side of the pond, the Wheatsheaf Inn a few yards further on and the wheelwright's yard, bright with two new carts which were painted a cheerful blue and red. Then she stopped. She knew there was no smithy, of course.

But she was not prepared for the building which had taken its place, and which moreover was called "The Smithy." It was a splendid little house built in the Dutch style, and with a great sloping and overhanging roof of red tiles which would have done credit to Delft or Haarlem. A low fence enclosed the garden. On the gate there was a plate of dull copper representing a hammer and an anvil, and above this was the name, "The Smithy."

Joan stood, riveted to the ground. It was impossible to believe that this was the place where she had passed so many years of her life. Every sign of the smithy gone too, and yet the fact of its existence recorded in the name. How curious and unexpected, and thrilling. She leaned against the fence, stared at the house, stared until it disappeared.

And see now — there stood the old smithy once more. And a black horse, by name Peter, was being shod, and a little wild bird of a girl danced joyously up to the forge, and the blacksmith laughed and cried out: "Hullo, here's the pride of the forge and she's just in time to help with Peter. . . ." When Joan heard that loved voice in the very place where she had always heard it, the past became the present, and she flung open the gate and ran up to the house, calling aloud: "Father — father."

Suddenly a great bulldog made his appearance, and with a savage growl rushed towards her. This danger roused her to her senses. With the alertness of a wild animal she sprang aside, and before he made his second attack, she snatched off her hat and held it for him to bury his teeth in, and as he did that, she caught him by the throat. At that moment a man dashed out of the house shouting: "Down, Bill, down, you brute," and seized his collar. Joan let go her clutch and picked up her hat which the dog had dropped immediately on the release of his throat muscles. Dog, man and woman stood con-

fronting each other in a dazed bewilderment, so sudden had been the attack, the repulse, the rescue.

The man spoke first.

"I'll chain him up," he said. "He's a fierce brute, I'm sorry he went for you, but he's here to keep off trespassers. But you did manage him well. That's the trick, if one has only the presence of mind to remember."

"Don't chain him," Joan said. "I'm not frightened. He won't hurt me if you tell him not to."

"I can't trust him," the man said, shaking his head. "You've roused the devil in him."

"Don't chain him," she repeated. "After all, I ought to be the one chained, not he. He was only doing his duty, and I was obeying an impulse I ought to have resisted."

The man glanced at her and smiled a little uneasily.

"Well, then, if you like, we'll chance it," he said. "I can see you have no fear. Down, Bill, do you hear. Down, Bill. Quiet, quiet. Lie down. Lie down. Do you hear me? Down, sir. Good dog. It's all right. There now, old chap. It's all right. Good dog."

Bill subsided and contented himself with an intermittent low growl and a continuous watchfulness, which did not appear to affect Joan in the least. Once more she stared at the house with sightless eyes which vainly sought the power of vision, and then with that same curious unfulfilment of focus considered the surroundings, the garden, the pathway, the flowers, the hedge.

The man watched her. It was evident that she puzzled him.

"What is it you want?" he said at last. "What was the impulse which you say you ought to have resisted? What is it you want? I don't know who you are, but you're evidently a stranger in these parts. I've never seen you before. I thought you were a tramp. But of course you're not."

"I'm not a stranger," Joan said, coming out of her reverie. "But I am a sort of tramp. I've tramped nearly fifty miles. And the reason why I could not resist coming into your garden is that this was once my home. I am the daughter of the blacksmith who used to live here. And when I saw the name, 'The Smithy,' I felt — well, I don't know what I felt."

The man's manner changed instantly from a mere passive interest to an active eagerness.

"Come in, come in," he said, his face lighting up with a smile. "If you're the blacksmith's daughter, my wife and I must give you a better welcome than the one you've had already."

But Joan shook her head.

"I could not come in," she said. "It is kind of you to ask me. But I couldn't. I simply couldn't cross the threshold of the new smithy. It would be impossible to me. But I do want to tell you how grateful I am you've called your home 'The Smithy.' It is a beautiful idea. It is a true tribute to those who lived and worked here."

"We believe in the spirit of place," the man said gravely.

The memory of the occasion flashed through Joan's brain when Horace had first used those very words to her and had unfolded their meaning.

"The spirit of place," she repeated dreamily.

"And I must tell you," the man went on, "there are times when the blacksmith works here now. Yes, in the dead of the night we hear him. We heard him last night — the first time for many months. It is strange that you should come here to-day. And yet not strange, when one remembers how this world which many call real is linked up with that other world which to some of us at least is still more real."

"You hear him in the dead of the night," Joan said,

greatly stirred. "What wouldn't I give to hear him — and be with him at the forge."

With a gesture which had something in it of world weariness, she turned to go.

"Don't go," he said kindly. "You're tired out. If you won't come in, wait whilst I fetch my wife. She would wish to see you and give you God-speed. Look here, sit down on this bench. I'll take the dog away. Even now I wouldn't care to have him out of my sight; though I must say we've managed between us to quell him successfully. Won't you wait?"

She shook her head.

"I think I want to go," she answered in a low voice charged with pain; and with her hand pressed tightly to her breast, she passed down the path, out of the gate and into the road.

He stood watching her.

"She will come back," he said to himself. "She will come back in the dead of the night. Old memories and new longings will bring her."

Joan retraced her steps over the village green and made straight for Mrs. Gifford's cottage, with its red-tiled roof and old-fashioned garden. Mrs. Gifford and Lizz were waiting for her, and one or two of the neighbors had gathered together hearing that she had come. She faced them all with a bright countenance and a gaiety of manner which would have surprised that stranger who a few minutes ago had been the witness of her deep emotion. But she was honestly glad to see her old friends, and quite determined that none of them should learn from her any details of her difficulties. It positively amused her to parry their inquiries and run the gauntlet of their inquisitiveness. Her answers were almost Machiavellian; and she laughed when she made them and congratulated herself on having at least got some practical help out of that old Renaissance.

Why had she walked all this way? Oh well, she had needed some outburst of activity to break the habit of a sedentary life. And her husband, where was he, and why did he not come, too? Oh, he was at home, busy with his books as ever, and he had always hated walking and indeed traveling of any kind. In fact, movement had always been a tragedy to him, whereas absence of movement was becoming a sort of tragedy to her. And so she had enjoyed this long tramp more than she could say. Had he been good to her? Had she been happy? Well now, did she look unhappy? No, she certainly did not look unhappy, it was agreed by all. Was she poor, was she rich? Oh, as for that, they had plenty and in abundance. Who could want more? And had she had only the one little baby girl who had died? Yes, just the one little child who had died.

Shoals of other questions might perhaps have taxed Joan's brave gaiety, forbearance and cleverness, but that her old playmate Seth Gifford who had always loved her and in his slow, dull way been her devoted slave, intervened on her behalf. He never knew, of course, how grateful she was, but she could really have hugged him for his timely help.

"Come now, mother," he said, "if thou wert a Christian woman, thou'd be concerning self about getting something for the little 'un to eat, and for some water to clean her face with. Right dirty be your face, Joan, same as it used to be when we played about together. I washed it then many a time, didn't I?"

"Yes," laughed Joan; "indeed you did, Seth, and spared me many a scolding."

"Perhaps I'd better wash it now," Seth said with a smile which made his face distinctly handsome.

They all laughed, and the Court of Inquisition broke up. In a few minutes Joan with a clean face and tidy hair was sitting at the kitchen table drinking tea and mak-

ing short work of a handsome share of bread and bacon. Seth, who had come in from the fields for his second breakfast, settled down opposite and looked at her from time to time, nodding at her between long draughts of tea. Lizz, resplendent in her cheap finery, sat next to her and by contrast showed up Joan's plain frock to great advantage. This struck Seth's brain and he said:

"Joan would never wear clothes like yours, Lizz, not if she had pots of money. She'd never make of herself a sight same as you."

"You leave off teasing Lizz, Seth," Joan said. "I won't stand it any more now than I stood it seven years ago."

"There, didn't I say she'd never change?" Lizz said triumphantly.

"Not a sign of a change in her face, either," Mrs. Gifford said; and she put her hand round the back of Joan's neck and pinched it, her special form of caress which Joan well remembered. In every way and by every sign, they all welcomed her back and took it for granted that she should stay beneath their roof. She was so happy to be with these friends who had known her and loved her from childhood, that at first nothing in them jarred on her, neither their rougher ways, nor their ruder speech, nor their narrower outlook. For the moment she took her place amongst them as in the past, and went dancing about the cottage in light-hearted fashion, pouncing upon the familiar objects which had been her playthings, and even unearthing from its accustomed drawer the tattered black-letter Bible with its queer pictures and silver clasps which had always served to keep her quiet and good.

Seth watched her for some time in silence and then rose.

"Come with me, Joan," he said in his slow drawl. "I'm going to the barley field beyond Fletcher's Mill. Ye

can leave me there, and run back to the women-folk. Ye can still run like a rabbit, I dare swear."

"I'm ready," Joan said, darting off in front of him, and then returning to meet him. "Seth, I believe you're slower than ever, slower than any slug! And I won't come with you if you don't step out a little at least like a respectable snail. So now you know."

Mrs. Gifford stood at the gate watching them, and heard Seth's laugh.

"He were always that fond of her," she said, shaking her head sadly. "The book learning did it. It were only the book learning that came between them. Well, well, it were a queer story, and no mistake she married a queer sort of gentleman. But she don't look unhappy. No one can say that."

Meantime Joan and Seth were on their way to the barley field. He did not speak a word for some time, but that did not surprise Joan, for he had always been a silent companion. But suddenly he stopped dead and said, without looking at her:

"Seven years ago, Joan, I tell ye I was nigh axing the man that took you. Axing the man and hanging for it."

"Seth, Seth, don't speak like that," Joan said. "Please, please don't. It's too dreadful. You can't mean it."

"Aye, but I must speak like that," he said with an intensity which was all the more painful because of its slowness; "and I tell ye, I'll axe him now and hang for it if he's not been good to ye. Has he been good to ye? Answer me that straight, Joan."

"He has always been good to me," Joan answered defiantly.

"He wouldn't let ye come home," he said roughly.

"I didn't want to come home," she said. "I know it

sounds awful, Seth, but I didn't want to come home."

"Ah, well, that ends it, if ye didn't want to come home," he drawled out, and he turned away from her. "No use hanging for that, be it?"

"No," she said, and they walked on in silence until they reached Fletcher's Mill. The mill was on the right-hand side of the road, at the beginning of the moor, and the barley field was on the left, directly opposite. Seth opened the gate and was passing through, when he changed his mind, shut the gate again and leaned against it, looking down from his great height at the little figure facing him.

"Joan," he cried in a sudden frenzy of passionate desire, "ye are mine and not that foreign man's—ye are mine—and ye've come back to me at last—say it, my girl—say it—say it—I must have ye—I want ye—I must have ye—ye are mine—not his—say it—my lass."

"No, I don't say it," she answered fiercely. "I'm neither yours, nor his, nor any one's. I belong to myself—myself—myself. Do you hear me? How dare you speak to me like that?"

She turned her back on him and left him, furious with him, irritable with herself and out of tune suddenly with the whole place and its inhabitants. And it was then that she began to wonder vaguely for the first time what she was going to do with herself.

It became clear to her as the day went on and she saw more of the Giffords and the Smiths and the Thaxtons, that there was nothing for her amongst them, and that mentally she had passed on to a distant country where another language was spoken. She was glad enough to have seen her old friends, but they meant to her nothing more than figures moving across the stage, not so real, she confessed to herself with a laugh, as the people of the

Italian Renaissance, César Borgia for instance, or Beatrice D'Este, or Guidobaldo of Urbino, or Pico della Mirandola, or any of them.

And this brought her to Horace. She rather wondered what he was doing, but she had not the slightest inclination to return to him, nor the faintest repentance for her flight nor for the destruction of those notebooks. It never entered her head that he might be suffering over her disappearance. And if such a thought had occurred to her, she probably would have felt no concern for him: for all emancipation necessarily implies a disregard of all consequences save the clearing of the path leading to the longed-for goal; and the inflicting of pain on others is but a part of the process, ruthless but inevitable. For the moment nothing counted with her, except the immense and passionate relief of having broken her bonds and escaped into a freedom of her own contriving.

And thus it was that she was angry with Seth not only because he had been unable to control his sudden passion and longing, but also because he or any one should have dared to threaten that newly found freedom by means of which she was beginning to enter into her kingdom. But of course he did not know that. Her fierceness only had reached him, and he knew he had deserved it. He made this clear to her when he came home that evening and found her in the kitchen alone making up the fire, while Mrs. Gifford was finishing off some washing in the outhouse, and Lizz was displaying her fine clothes to a dressmaker friend who lived at the other end of the village near the Church. He hung his head and stood waiting for her to turn round and speak one word to him, so that he might ask for forgiveness. She turned round, and saw a look of pain on his face and a dimness in his blue eyes.

She stretched out her hand to him, and gave him a smile of welcome, grave but kind.

"Joan, my lass, forgive me," he said in a low voice; "will ye forgive me?"

"Yes, yes," she answered, "I forgive you, old Seth."

"Aye, but ye were fierce," he said. "But it were only fitting to be fierce. Ye had the right to your fierceness."

"Yes, I had the right to it," she said. "But now it's over, past and gone."

"Aye, and the danger from me is past and gone," he said. "I swear it, Joan. Ye'll not be leaving us because of me?"

"No, when I leave here it won't be because of you, Seth," she said. "I swear it."

"Aye, it would be fearful, that," he said with a shudder. "Never could I raise my head if I'd drove ye from our home."

"I swear it, Seth, by the memory of my father," she said earnestly. "And you know I loved him—even though I left him. Be at peace, old Seth."

He nodded. The cloud cleared from his face, and he spoke a little about her father, not much, since he was a man of few words; but somehow she was able to bear to learn from him and him only something about her old home, something about her father's last days and sudden death, and her mother's illness and death and the burning down of the smithy.

She was too proud to ask a single question, although there were things she hungered to know. He told her just what came into his slow brain, in detached sentences, which she herself wove into a connected whole. But there was one thing Seth related which was worth all the rest to Joan. It was something her father had said. Seth didn't understand what it meant, but had remembered it and treasured it in secret to tell her some day. No one else had heard it. It was this. He had said:

"I shall be waiting and working at the Forge all the

same as now if Joan don't come for a hundred year or more. Time be nothing."

Seth spoke it in his slow, labored drawl, as one repeating a lesson learnt by heart with effort and difficulty. His method of stating it seemed only to add to its directness and its reality; and the moment Joan heard it, a thrill passed through her, and she recalled what that man had said to her at the new smithy about the blacksmith working in the dead of the night. It crossed her mind that she would go there that very night. Yes, she would steal out when the Giffords were all asleep and the house was still and the village was at rest. No one need know.

And she could return—but why should she return? What was there to return for? She could just take her wallet and go—be thankful to go, in fact: for once the excitement of coming back had died down, every hour showed her that these people were not her world any longer, could never be her world. She did not criticize them any more than she had criticized the woman with the raven black hair, and moreover she was far too glad to see these old friends to criticize them.

But if she had any definite hope that by coming to the place of her birth and mixing with the people amongst whom she had lived, she would be able to find out what she had been like and thus recapture her previous identity and start afresh on her own lines, she would have been bitterly disappointed with her visit. But her ideas were so vague and her intentions so shadowy, that the certainty that there was nothing there for her did not oppress her in the least. On the contrary it rather exhilarated her. It kept her free, uncaged—and the world was hers.

So she spent that evening with her friends, as one sitting in an inn, a deeply interested but detached wayfarer, content to be pausing for a moment and content to be moving on to other scenes and other circumstances. It

must have been nearly ten o'clock when one or two of the neighbors who had looked in, took their leave, and Mrs. Gifford and Lizz made up a bed for her on the old shiny horse-hair sofa in the little sitting-room where the black-letter Bible lived and wonderful pieces of china which no dealer had ever been able to coax and cajole away from the family.

About an hour or so afterwards, Joan had reason to believe that the household was fast asleep; for she could hear steady and continued snoring upstairs, cumulative and reassuring. She sat on the edge of the couch for some little time and listened. Yes, all was well. She dressed, put on her wallet and crept to the door. But suddenly she hesitated, relit her candle, and looked about for a piece of paper. On it she wrote these words:—

“A bit of true gratitude and a blessing from little Joan. And good-by. And tell Seth I swear it.”

Noiselessly now she opened the door and noiselessly she closed it. Another minute she had reached the village green. The night was pitch dark, but the darkness held no fears for Joan, and she could have found her way sightless to the smithy, past the three large elm trees by the side of the pond, past the “Wheatsheaf” and the wheelwright’s yard, and so up to the very precincts of her old home. The garden gate was open and she went through, heedless of all danger, detached from all outer circumstance. She stood listening, listening for the sound of the blacksmith working in the dead of the night. The stranger’s words echoed back to her: “In the dead of the night we hear him.” And her father’s own words were borne to her:

“Time be nothing — time be nothing — I shall be waiting and working at the forge all the same as now if Joan don’t come for a hundred year or more.”

CHAPTER VIII

NOT a sound was to be heard. The thousand voices of nature were hushed. She herself scarcely breathed, scarcely stirred, so tense was the expectancy of her mind and the longing of her heart. Nothing reached her ears. Yet still she stood and waited. A long time passed, and still that little lonely figure waited, unconscious of her body, given over to her spirit, and uplifted by some power outside her own body and her own spirit. But nothing reached her. And at last she came back to a realization of outer conditions and facts, and knew that she was tired, desolate and disappointed. She took a few steps forward and stumbled over something. It was only one of those rough garden rustic seats, but it seemed a paradise of comfort to her as she sank back into it, drew her cloak tighter round her and closed her eyes.

But hush — hush, what was that faint sound? Wafted as if from a far distance, and now less faint and less far and yet still only a soft almost inaudible whisper, and now gaining in strength, in tone, in sharpness, and yet ever far off, far off, and now nearer and nearer, always nearer — the sound of the blacksmith working at his forge in the dead of the night — at last — at last.

“Father,” she cried.

And all at once she saw him as well as heard him. The glow from the forge lit up his countenance. His arm was raised to strike on the anvil with his great hammer. He turned to her as he had always turned when she crept into the smithy, and these words were borne to her:

“Ah, my little one, you’re there, you’re there. I knew

you'd come when you were free. No one can do anything without freedom. I knew you'd come."

"Father," she cried, in an ecstasy of joy and thankfulness, "then you've understood."

The vision faded — the sound ceased.

Joan slept.

CHAPTER IX

WHEN Joan left the living-room after Horace had struck her, he was appalled with himself and awed by her. It was not in his nature to dash after her and ask her forgiveness then and there; but if ever a man were abjectly ashamed and remorseful, that man was Holbrook as he sank back into his chair in a state of nervous collapse. For he was not only hard hit by his own violence, but by the devastating fact that his work of seven years, the molding of Joan's mind, lay in ruins. He had considered this achievement the most interesting, absorbing and successful in his life, as well as the happiest: a triumph, in fact, mental, emotional, physical, psychical. Now he knew it was no triumph, but a defeat, entire and abject. He said the words aloud, with such strength as remained to him.

"An abject defeat," he said.

And when he remembered afresh that he had struck her, he shuddered afresh.

"And I struck her — I struck her," he murmured.

It never for a moment entered his head that she would not return; and vaguely, dimly he imagined to himself their interview of reconciliation, his regret frankly and fully expressed and her surrender renewed and continued.

After a time, he attempted to gather himself together and even tried to concentrate his thoughts on the Renaissance. When he failed, he gave himself a hypodermic injection of strychnine, and again turned to the new preface on which he was engaged. He wrote down these

sentences which had arrested his attention in another book:

"This continued increase of curiosity, this widening of interest introduces a succession of subjects for historic research; and documents once regarded as unimportant are now found to yield information as to the silent growth of tendencies which gradually became influential. The mass of letters and papers, increasing at a rate that seems to be accelerated from year to year, offers a continual series of new suggestions. They not only supplement what was known before, but frequently require so much readjustment of previous judgments, that a new presentation of the whole subject becomes necessary. . . ."

But after this he got no further, and he leaned over his desk, his pen idle in one hand, and drumming on the paper listlessly with the other. His eyes were closed. Once or twice he turned his head round as if straining to catch some sound. At last he rose and stood before Joan's table, fingered her pen, put a fresh nib in it, examined the moss which he had brought in for her, and then walked about the room, stopping occasionally to listen. Later he fetched some bread, some cheese and a small bottle of claret, and took his frugal dinner at the table in the right-hand corner near the fireplace. He poured out a second glassful and cut another instalment of bread and cheese, which he placed on another plate. He waited, his eyes riveted on the open trap-door. And still she did not come. Then he drew his chair up to the fire and lit his pipe; and as he bent forward to warm his cold hands, he saw a few fragments of paper torn from her notebooks which chanced to have escaped entire destruction by fire. When he caught sight of them, he had an attack of absolute fury.

"How dared she — how dared she," he cried; "the record of my thoughts, my reflections, my deductions entrusted to her — the fruit of years of research and con-

struction, imparted freely to her and now lost to me forever — the Savonarola studies above all — lost — lost.”

If Joan had returned at that moment, it is possible he might almost have murdered her, so passionate was his anger, so poignant his sense of irreparable loss, so outraged his pride of scholarship. But this phase too passed. And when the afternoon wore on and still she had not come back, the lonely man searched everywhere for her and called her name, not in anger, but in an agony of distress.

He wandered in vain on the moor and crept down on a voyage of discovery to the village where he had not been seen for months; but he did not find Joan, and he was too proud, too haughty to ask whether by any chance she had called at the postoffice or the grocer's or anywhere. He was out of touch with every one, had kept every one at arm's length, had shut the door against the whole village: so that the people whom he met did not dare nor care to make even the slightest sign of a greeting as he went by. Perhaps if some one had spoken a word to him, he might have brought himself to give utterance to the question which was on his lips. But he returned home, carrying the secret of his anxiety with him, and tenfold more forlorn than when he had ventured forth, because for the first time for many years, he had realized his entire isolation.

He lit a lamp and placed it in the window facing the moor, and then threw himself on the couch and thought over the whole scene with Joan and every detail of the circumstances. He tried to piece together every fragment of recent conversation between herself and himself, every separate and insignificant incident, so as to form a mental picture which would reveal to him the meaning and the cause of what had happened. He recalled her words, word by word, and sentence by sentence, and said them aloud:

"I burnt the notebooks because they were not me — because they were only you — only you, and nothing of me — your thoughts, your ideas, your opinions — nothing of me.

"I'm tired of being a machine set in movement by you. I'm tired of being a parrot.

"Lots of things I meant to tell you. But now you've made it impossible. I shall never tell you. Never in my life."

A parrot — a machine — lots of things she meant to tell him — and now never in her life — never.

He repeated the words incessantly until at last, so he thought, light broke in on him and suspicion leaped into his brain. She must have had secrets from him. In spite of all his watchful care, some one had been influencing her. Who was it? She had been complaining of her eyes for some time. She had gone to London to see the oculist. Had she seen him? Had her eyes really been suffering? Or had she merely made them an excuse for other plans? His suspicion grew apace. He began to imagine evil things of her which in a saner, calmer moment he would have owned to be impossible to her character, and unworthy even of passing consideration from him. But there was the excuse for him that the utter desolation in which he found himself fostered his morbidness, and that his natural morbidness was in itself a fit soil for the growth of rank weeds. Yet this phase of suspicion was intermittent, not continuous. It was separated by attacks of fierce though justifiable anger at the destruction of those notebooks and fury at the failure of his life's plans, and by waves of longing, anxiety, concern, tenderness, remorse and self-reproach.

Had he treated his little Joan fairly? Had he taken a wrong advantage of her elasticity, her pliability, her extraordinary responsiveness? He knew well he had, and this too added to his torture. Throughout that long

night the only thought that eased the tension of his mind, the tearing at his heart, was that Beaudesart still remained an unfailing friend to whom he could turn, and that he could go to Beaudesart or send for him and ask for his help and counsel.

Towards dawn he slept a little, and when he woke and remembered how things stood with him, he decided that he could not stop there doing nothing, but that he would go to Beaudesart instead of sending for him, and that he would call at the oculist and find out whether Joan had really been there. Yet all the time he was making his preparations, he broke off constantly and listened. It was evident that he still hoped for Joan's return. And even after he had shut up the barn house and stood ready for his journey, he waited and listened. He took a few steps on to the moor and called her name. There was no answer. He made his way to the station and arrived there looking deadly pale and wan. The station-master was astonished to see him, for Holbrook seldom left the precincts of his home. But he would not have ventured to address a single word to him if Horace Holbrook had not approached him and said in that quick, irritable manner peculiar to him:

"Thursfield, I shall not be home till to-morrow. I am not taking the evening train home to-day."

"No, sir," Thursfield answered, wondering how on earth that concerned him, considering that he never saw Mr. Holbrook from one year's end to another.

Horace walked abruptly away, as if he had already said too much. But he returned almost as abruptly, stared vacantly first at Thursfield's chrysanthemums and then at the man himself and jerked out:

"Did Mrs. Holbrook leave a book when she went by the train yesterday?"

No one ever knew what it cost Holbrook to ask that question, simple and non-committal as it was, nor how

anxiously he waited for an answer which might give him a clue to Joan's whereabouts.

Thursfield shook his head.

"No, Mr. Holbrook," he said. "She dropped no book that I saw."

"Ah," reasoned Holbrook, "then she *did* take the train yesterday."

But Thursfield added immediately:

"You mean the day before yesterday, of course. No, sir, she dropped no book."

"I mean yesterday," Horace said irritably, and with some insistence.

"As you please, Mr. Holbrook," the station-master said soothingly. "Only she weren't here yesterday. No one was. It was a dead day, yesterday. No passengers and no parcels. Nothing doing, except my gardening. But I'll inquire about the book at the other end, if you'll tell me the name."

He took out a pencil and notebook, but Holbrook, frowning fiercely, walked away from him without a word. Thursfield looked after him and was beginning to relieve his feelings by an outburst of language suitable to the occasion, when the train was signaled, and professional demands took precedence of private and personal animus. His mind only returned to Holbrook as he caught a glimpse of him later in a third-class carriage in the rear of the slowly disappearing train.

"Damned curmudgeon—that's what he is," he thought. "And one day that little wife of his will leave him. And serve him right. If that's not true, let me never grow another flower, small or great."

Horace Holbrook meantime, alone in the carriage, was saying aloud:

"She did not take the train from here. Where did she take it from? Did she take it from S——? Or even from Z——? Yes, perhaps even from Z——? Twenty

or thirty miles would be nothing to her if she had got it into her head to walk that distance and pick up the London train from there."

For it was a fixed idea in his brain that Joan had gone to London. Never once did it strike him that she might perhaps have gone to her old home. He had never had any interest in nor respect for her old surroundings. From the moment he took her away, he meant Joan to be his and his only; and with a callousness which had been heartless and brutal he had alienated her from her own people in a clever, subtle way, unguessed at by Joan. So that now her old home did not enter into his calculations. It simply did not exist for him. And if he had been reminded of its existence, he would not have easily believed that it had any remaining significance for Joan. No, he was convinced that she had gone to London, and that her strange outbreak and sudden disappearance were directly connected with the hidden events of that day when she went to see the oculist. Well, did she see the oculist? That was the first point to determine.

When he arrived at Liverpool Street, he lost no time in trying to find out. He hated taxi-cabs; and his nerves were always jarred beyond endurance in them; but he got into one, and sat huddled up and all on end with himself until the chauffeur slowed down at a house in Harley Street.

When the maid opened the door to him, he was in a state of scarcely suppressed excitement and intense irritability. His strange manner, the queer lopsided way in which he held himself, his disheveled appearance, his ancient felt hat tilted back so as not to touch his forehead, and his stick held in an unconsciously menacing fashion, produced an unfavorable impression on the mind of the custodian of the sacred consulting room. But experience had taught Winchester to be cautious. He might be an old client — perhaps a duke — or as he was

shabby, a millionaire. Once she had made a terrible blunder over a duke. She always shuddered to think of it. It was always wiser to err on the side of indulgence, and therefore she greeted the stranger with her patient smile of grave courtesy.

"I want to see Mr. Ribblesdale at once," Holbrook said abruptly. "Holbrook is my name. Holbrook. I want to see him at once."

"Have you an appointment?" the maid said sweetly.

"Appointment," repeated Holbrook angrily. "No, of course I haven't. Appointment indeed. Certainly not. I want to see him at once."

He tapped on the tessellated ground with his stick, as if to accentuate his wishes.

"He does not see any one without an appointment," Winchester said soothingly. "And even if he was at home, he is full up to-day."

"Oh, indeed," said Holbrook, still more angrily. "Full up, is he? Then he'll be still fuller up, for I'm going to see him, I can tell you."

"Perhaps you will kindly wait in the waiting-room whilst I make inquiries, sir," Winchester said with saint-like patience. And she headed for that dismal lethal chamber, thankful from the bottom of her heart that it existed, and fervently wishing that she could lock people up in it as travelers were locked up in foreign railway waiting-rooms until the arrival of the train.

But Holbrook did not follow her. He stood and waved his stick excitedly.

"Wait in one of those wretched dens, with those devastating back numbers of magazines hitting you in the face," he said fiercely. "No, thank you. Certainly not. I shall wait in the hall."

He began pacing up and down the hall like a lunatic, until it suddenly struck Winchester that perhaps he was one, especially after his remark about those sacred and

primæval magazines which were symbols of the profession, as indispensable and holy as lenses — or forceps or any surgical instruments. Probably it was safer to humor a man with an irreverent mind like that. She cast an uneasy eye on poor Holbrook, vanished, was absent a brief minute or two, reappeared and signed to the lunatic to follow her.

"Ah," he said, appeased. "What are these people for if we can't see them?"

The oculist was standing with his back to the fire, smoking a cigarette which he threw away when Horace Holbrook was shown into the consulting room. He was obviously annoyed at being disturbed and bit his lip from vexation. But something in Holbrook's appearance arrested his attention; and he knew at once that here was some one, weird and peculiar enough, but a scholar and a gentleman.

"Well, what can I do for you, sir?" he said brusquely, but not disagreeably. "I have two or three minutes to spare before starting off on an urgent operation in the country."

"I know all about urgent operations in the country," Holbrook said. "I lived for five years with a surgeon. It was cricket in those days. I suppose it's golf now. Anyway it's always something. It has to be. I admit that. But I won't keep you two minutes. Here's your fee of two guineas. Three, if you wish. I've not come here to impose on you. I want to ask you a question. It is this. Did . . ."

He stopped.

"Well," said the oculist, interested in spite of himself.

Holbrook drew a long breath and looked fixedly on the floor.

"Did a little woman of the name of Holbrook come to consult you three days ago?" he said with great effort, as if every word was being dragged out of him.

And he added:

"My wife, in fact."

"Oh, that's a simple enough question," Ribbesdale said with a laugh. "I wish all questions were as simple."

He opened his case book and searched the pages with his right forefinger, but kept a watchful eye on his visitor in case of unexpected developments vaguely suggested by Winchester.

"Yes, here's the entry, 'Holbrook, Joan, married,'" he said.

And he went on, with a smile which suggested some pleasant memory:

"Of course, I remember her well. A little woman. Gave me the impression of a little wild bird. I was so surprised when she wanted to keep her eyes intact because of the Italian Renaissance. I could not help laughing secretly, because it seemed so incongruous with her appearance. But of course she didn't know I thought that."

"You're sure she didn't know that?" Holbrook asked quickly, his suspicions at once aroused.

"Oh, yes," Ribbesdale answered, surprised at his visitor's intensity. "Absolutely sure. You can be quite at rest about that. It would never do to show what one thought, would it? And you can be quite at ease about her sight too. But she must learn to keep the print at the prescribed distance. Everything turns on that."

Holbrook nodded. Suspicious though he was, he knew enough of medical men to realize that the oculist was speaking the truth, and that no slight had been put on the Renaissance. It was evident that Joan had been here, but it was also evident that it was not here she had been influenced. He put three guineas on the desk and turned to go. But Ribbesdale detained him.

"No, no, Mr. Holbrook," he said. "Please don't leave that money. I really couldn't stand it. I ask you as a

favor not to leave it. And look here, if there is anything more you want to know, those two minutes I mentioned will stretch. Wonderful how two minutes can stretch — when one wishes they should."

Holbrook nodded again. He accepted the surgeon's kindness, and ventured on one more question.

"Did she say she was tired of the Renaissance?" he asked in a low voice.

"No, on the contrary," Ribbesdale answered. "The Italian Renaissance appeared to be the only thing for which she lived. Well, you can judge what an impression her interest in it made on me when I tell you that I myself felt impelled to read something about the Renaissance again, and went out and bought this volume. Here it is: *Studies in the Italian Renaissance*, by E. S. Smith-Jones."

Holbrook, whose angry excitement had entirely died down, turned over one or two of the pages listlessly and replaced the book on the table without a word of comment.

"I won't keep you any longer now," he said with a smile which had in it a distinct charm of courtesy. "Thank you."

He had reached the door, when he paused and said with a slight frown:

"The trouble about all Smith-Jones's work is its entire inaccuracy."

Then Ribbesdale did an unusual thing, of which Winchester did not usually approve, but for which she was on this occasion devoutly thankful. Her great man followed Holbrook to the door and saw him safely out of the house.

"A queer fellow," he thought. "If not mad, at least very strange. And what did he exactly come for? Was it anxiety about his wife's eyes? Or did he merely want to find out whether she had complained of overwork?"

And why did he suddenly become suspicious? Oh well, I give it up. These scholars and literary people are beyond human ken. Aha, but he did know about the golf, didn't he?"

He smiled and soon forgot the incident amongst the many arduous but well paid duties awaiting him.

But Horace went away, more at sea than ever and hopelessly perplexed. He had learnt nothing to help him either in his diagnosis of the situation or in his search for Joan. In the first place, she had spoken the truth in saying that she had been to the oculist. That put him wrong in one of his surmises. And in the second place, he saw clearly that it was not there that she had been influenced against her work. And thirdly, he argued to himself that if she had been sick and tired of the Renaissance, this fact would have come out in the course of her conversation with the oculist. It would have come out naturally, in connection with the fatigue of her eyes. But no such thing. What *did* come out was her enthusiasm. This baffled him, whilst it touched him too. Some other person then had been putting ideas in her head.

Who could it be? How could he find out? Well, well, thank goodness, there was Beaudesart to consult. He could lay the whole matter before Beaudesart; and the sooner he got to his studio the better.

He crossed Portland Place and turned into Great Portland Street. He passed the very bird shop before which Joan had stood riveted, and he heard that same parrot pouring out the same mechanical stream of detached sentences. He saw the same man, the owner of the shop, who looked like a bird himself, a hawk with a hungry eye. If he had only known it, here was the hidden trail, here the clue which would have guided him through the labyrinth to the secret source. But not knowing he missed his chance.

His thoughts were centered on Beaudesart, and, as he

went along, he reflected that of all the friends whom he had had in his life, Will Beaudesart was the only one really worth retaining. Not for a moment did he regret Eridge, nor any of the people whom he had callously thrust out of his life; but he did say to himself that he would indeed at this moment of his misery be in a sorry plight if he had been so unmerciful to himself — yes, that was the right phrase — unmerciful to himself — as to have quarreled with old Beaudesart. It had nearly come to pass once — nearly.

But old Beaudesart had been splendid. He always was splendid. Loyal, faithful and built on large lines. Had never in his life failed anybody — except himself. And never would fail anybody.

So Holbrook arrived at the studio, and rang. There was no answer and he rang again, this time impatiently; for it was his nature to become unreasonably irritable the moment he was thwarted and impeded. Henry Hereford, who was alone in possession, opened the door. He held a water-color palette in one hand and a brush in his mouth.

"Come in," he said absent-mindedly. "I don't know who you are, but I suppose you want Beaudesart. He will be back soon. Come in and wait."

He left Holbrook standing in the doorway, and chased back to the picture on which he was engaged and from which he had evidently torn himself with difficulty. It was a field of clover under a threatening sky, but with a glint of sunshine adding a luster to the purple mantle. Holbrook glanced at it, glanced at the intent figure working with a peaceful paradise-like smile on his face, glanced round the room where he himself had so spent many hours in the past, took in all the familiar details in one swift comprehensive survey, and then walked up to the easel at the farther end of the studio.

He stopped suddenly — and a low cry broke from him.

For there before him, on the easel, was a truly wonderful charcoal portrait of Joan, and strewn around were rejected beginnings, studies, sketches, impressions of that little face with its keen eyes and haunting eagerness. Nothing but Joan here. Nothing but Joan. Joan everywhere. Joan pervading the place.

An insanity of suspicion and jealousy took possession of Holbrook.

"My God," he shouted wildly. "So this is the meaning of it all. Beaudesart is the meaning of it all."

He seized the portrait, waved it about excitedly and was on the point of tearing it in two, when Henry Hereford rushed up to him and prevented him in time.

"No, no, you dare to touch that," he said in his professional voice of bullying intimidation. "Beaudesart values that tremendously."

"Yes, I daresay he does," Holbrook cried furiously. "And that's precisely why it has got to be destroyed. There—leave go—if you don't—I'll—I'll—throttle you—I warn you—I warn you—I'll——"

The barrister, a bully of the first water in the safety of the Courts, was a singularly peaceful and shrinking character in the ups and downs of unprotected private life. He had no wish to be throttled by this lunatic. No picture in the world was worth that sacrifice—no newly discovered Velasquez—no stolen Mona Lisa. He let it go.

But at the moment he let go, the door opened and Beaudesart came in whistling.

He stopped, dumbfounded.

"Horace!" he exclaimed. "You here!"

At the sound of his voice, Horace Holbrook dropped the portrait, and the two men stood facing each other, with the picture of Joan separating them.

CHAPTER X

FOR a moment neither spoke. Beaudesart was confused and perplexed, for he knew only too well that he had been allowing himself to think far too much of Joan; and in this respect he felt guilty and showed what he felt. His manner confirmed Holbrook in his suspicion, but at the same time calmed him in the certainty that he knew the truth at last, knew it after vain surmises of every kind, knew that the friend on whom he had hoped to lean was the foe who had struck him the blow.

"So you've been the enemy, Beaudesart," he said in a toneless voice. "So you've been the one who has taken Joan from me. Not in vain have I come here to find her."

"Come here to find her," Beaudesart repeated quickly, and in great surprise. "What in the name of Heaven do you mean, Holbrook?"

"Oh, you are going to tell me, I suppose, that you don't know she has left me," Horace said, losing his calm suddenly.

"Left you," Beaudesart exclaimed.

"And you're going to ask me to believe that it isn't to you she has come," Horace went on. "And with all this evidence strewn round. What do you take me for, I wonder?"

"Look here," said Beaudesart, in a voice which trembled from eagerness, "I can explain all this — by God I can — it is only that her little face, with its keen eyes and hauntingly eager look, ate into my brain — yes — into my heart if you like — and I had to put it down on

paper — yes, if I died for it I had to — I had to put it down on paper — that's all that this means — these scratches — these studies — these sketches — this portrait — something done from memory because I could not help myself — because the artist in me demanded it — and something else in me demanded it — something else which I haven't fought against enough — I own that frankly — but there's no more than that in it, absolutely no more — why, I've only seen her that once — and these were done from memory — from memory, I tell you — just as I've always been able to do faces in the past — you know that for yourself — and what I ought to have done with them, I'll do now — this moment — burn them — burn them and get rid of them — out of my sight and out of my memory too."

Quick as lightning he knelt down, gathered them together, seized the portrait too, and was dashing off with them to the fireplace when Holbrook prevented him.

"No, no," he said. "I couldn't stand them being burnt — let them be — I believe you — I suppose I'm half out of my mind — and utterly in the dark — and anything seems an explanation — let them be."

He sank into the armchair and covered his face with his hands. Beaudesart waited. They were now alone. Hereford feeling insecure had sought safety in flight and in the circumstances by no means regretted that he had not had the chance of submitting his clover field to Beaudesart's criticism. Beaudesart put the drawings aside and subsided into the other armchair. Maria, the black cat, emerged from some secret corner, made a mighty sound of purring, turned round several times on the hearth and settled down cozily in front of the fire.

It was an atmosphere of peace, and it lulled for a time the lurking suspicion in Holbrook's heart and quieted his nerves. This was the haven for which in his hour of necessity he had set out; and he had found it, after all,

in spite of doubts and misgivings. At last, when he was able to look up, he told his tale, with a wonderful self-restraint and dignity, considering the varying emotions to which he had been a prey since Joan left him. He omitted nothing: neither Joan's ruthlessness in burning those valuable notebooks nor his shame in having struck her.

"I struck her," he said in a low voice. "She maddened me. She seemed unconscious of my presence. *She looked past me.*"

He was silent for a moment or two, and Beaudesart did not so much as glance at him. He knew that his old friend was touching the depths of his shame and his suffering.

"So she has left me," he went on, still in that low tense voice. "And without a word. It has crossed my mind of course that an accident might have happened to her. But I've dismissed that idea. I don't believe any accident has happened to her. There was something final in her manner, Will. She meant to go. I did not think that at first. But the more I think of it, the more I know that she meant to leave me and not come back. That is why — why I could not go on waiting."

He paused again, and again Beaudesart did not dare look at him.

"She took nothing with her except her wallet, her stick and her cloak," he said. "But that would make no difference to my belief that she has gone her way. She would want so little. She always wanted so little. She ——"

Some tender memory of his little Joan claimed him. His voice faltered and words failed. He began pacing up and down the studio with his eyes fixed on the ground.

Then with sudden fierceness he broke out:

"But she must have had some secret plan. All along she must have had secrets from me. Fool that I've been

not to guess that before. She has been in close touch with some one. She has been under the influence of some one. And, by God, when I find out who the fiend is, I'll kill him — I'll kill him."

Beaudesart, who all this time had not spoken a single word and who had been thinking hard whilst he watched the tragic figure of his friend pacing up and down, now rose and intercepted him.

"I say, old chap," he said, "for mercy's sake leave off pacing up and down like a caged lion. It's the one thing I never could stand. And I'm not going to stand it now. Look here, sit down on this couch where you used to lie in the old days, and watch me cook some chops in this new-fangled electric stove which Eridge gave me and of which I'm frightened to death. We've got to eat. That's the first thing. Unless we're electrocuted, when it would be the last. We've got to eat. And we've got to sleep and forget. And then we've got to use our brains. For this is a devil of a mess, Horace. And you're not going to straighten it out by murdering any one — neither me nor any one. There isn't any one to murder. How could there be when you've kept her shut up in an iron safe all these years? Why, if you use your common sense, you'd see that no one could have had the barest chance of influencing her. No, it's my belief that you're up against something far more formidable than a mere human being. You're up against the Spirit of the Time. Oh, I don't mind how scornful you are, nor how much you laugh, provided you sit there quietly in that corner and don't pace up and down like a caged lion. The Spirit of the Time, I tell you. As modern and as real and as complicated too, unless properly understood, as this confounded electric stove. There now. I've started it — and Heaven help us. Just keep an eye on it whilst I fetch the potatoes. We'll have them baked. You always liked them baked, didn't you?"

He dashed off to his little larder, leaving Horace in the corner of the couch where he had allowed himself to be installed by his old comrade who in the past had always been able to manage him; and when Beaudesart returned with a dish of potatoes, he found Horace bending forward staring with all his might at the electric stove, which appeared to have taken his fancy.

"Anything happened in my absence?" Beaudesart asked quaintly. "Tell me the worst."

"Nothing," Horace said, his wan face lighting up with a smile. "You are an absurd chap. What could happen? Why, it's a beautiful little affair, and as simple as can be. I wish it were mine. Joan would have liked it."

As he spoke her name, his face hardened.

"I can never forgive her for having burnt those notebooks," he said fiercely. "I suppose you'd put that down to the Spirit of the Time, wouldn't you?"

"Look here," Beaudesart said cheerily, "I refuse to give the Spirit of the Time another thought until we've had a meal and a sleep. I haven't eaten or slept for hours. I got my new little Futurist picture off to an exhibition in the North only this morning. Nearly killed myself painting a sunset upside down. Frightfully exciting and stimulating, but exhausting. And on the top of it you — also upside down. No, I must eat and recover before I trouble myself about any one's concerns. By Jove, I wonder how we get more heat into this outfit — must increase it somehow — if we don't, we'll have to wait for the chops till the millennium — dare you touch it — I daren't — ah, you've dared — that's better, isn't it — upon my soul you ought to have been an electrician instead of an historian!"

So in this irresponsible, inconsequential and yet tender way characteristic of Beaudesart, he managed his old friend, blessing all the time the good luck that had lent him valuable aid in the shape of something that inter-

ested and fascinated Horace's brain. Before very long the chops were cooked and polished off. Coffee was prepared and drunk to the last drain in the pot; and poor Horace threw himself on the bed in the little inner room covered up with Beaudesart's lifelong dressing-gown and fell fast asleep. When Beaudesart heard the welcome sound of deep and regular breathing, he gave a sigh of relief, lit his pipe and began to think out the situation.

With one half of his nature he was shocked at Joan, for it was undeniable that her behavior was heartless and inhuman; and he had only to glance at his old friend to realize what fearful ravages it had already made on him. It was true that Horace had struck her; but even that did not justify her in burning those notebooks and going off without a word, without a sign, without a hint as to her plans and intentions.

Of course, even though Horace chose to reject the idea, there was the possibility that some accident might have happened to her and prevented her from sending even a message. But perhaps after all she had by now sent a message to the barn house. Or perhaps she had returned. No, it was not very probable that she would have returned. A little wild thing like herself once broken loose would not return so quickly and so tamely. Not she. And for the life of him, sorry as he was for poor old Horace, he could not help laughing a little at the dash and daring and thoroughness of the abandonment.

Ah, how he wished that instead of Horace, he himself had been the one to find her and share with her as much freedom and wildness as she wanted. Would he ever have struck her?

Well, there was no knowing. But in connection with Horace striking her and in justice to him, it had to be remembered that he was maddened not only by her callousness but by the burning of those notebooks which were invaluable to him as part and parcel of long years of his-

toric research. Beaudesart asked himself, who would not have been maddened in the circumstances? Suppose, for instance, she had destroyed some of his own studies, the accumulation of years of experiment in tone or line evolution, suppose she had burnt that Futurist sunset which had half annihilated him in the painting of it, and would probably annihilate every one in the beholding of it? Why, he wouldn't only have struck her — he would have killed her outright — that's what he would have done.

But at the moment when he had worked himself into a righteous rage against her, he remembered the dreary impression he had brought away of her conditions and surroundings, the woful isolation for one so young and eager, and the tyranny of her training as explained by Holbrook himself, which had struck him as being cruel and almost impious.

"Poor child, poor child," he said, "Mrs. Parflete is right. It's a wonder she stood it so long. Old Horace was an anachronism when he began the senseless game seven years ago. And now seven years later, no human word in a human dictionary could be found to describe him — even ichthyosaurian would be far, far too modern. Of course she couldn't go on submitting to that tyranny. She was certain sooner or later to throw off that bondage. And having done so, she's off on her own. What wouldn't I give to go in search of her, find her and never bring her back? Never give her up. Never. Nice loyal thoughts to have of your old friend's wife, aren't they? So absurd to pretend or demand that we always should have the right thoughts. Of course we haven't. And don't want to, either. Well, well, some one will have to get on the track of her — with her stick, her wallet and her cloak — by Jove, I see her with my mind's eye — I could do a charcoal of her now — with her cloak, her wallet and her stick."

He ran to his easel, fixed a sheet of paper on the board,

seized a stick of charcoal and raised his arm to begin, but suddenly let it fall.

"No," he said aloud. "No. It only encourages me. Wrong to him, wrong to her, wrong to myself. Wrong all along the line. And I told Mrs. Parflete I'd try to burn the old ones. And I didn't even try. I couldn't. And here I am wanting to do some more. Well, I must put up a fight this time."

He strolled over to the other end of the room where he had left the sketches, studies and portrait of little Joan, and without once looking at them, but quite deliberately, as if it had been his fixed intention for a long time, he threw first one, then another one and finally all of them except the portrait, into the fire. When he came to that, he stopped short.

"No," he said, "I can't and I won't destroy that. I simply can't."

And he put it carefully aside, and then seized the tongs and held the rest of the pictures down in the grate until a charred mass was the only remains of them. He was still standing there when the studio bell rang. He opened the door to Mrs. Parflete who was carrying a covered-up pie dish under her arm.

"I've come to try the electric cooker," she said. "I thought I'd christen the oven with a beefsteak and kidney pie—your favorite dish. But what's the matter with you? You do look a miserable object, Mr. Beaudesart."

"I'm so glad you've come," Beaudesart said. "You're the very person I want. Things have been happening here which have upset me a good deal. Partly my own fault of course—but there it is. Holbrook arrived suddenly this afternoon and is now asleep in my bedroom. His wife has left him. You said she would."

"She has left him, has she?" Mrs. Parflete exclaimed, pausing on the threshold.

Beaudesart nodded.

"Come in," he said. "I'll tell you all about it. Here, give me the dish, and let's put it in the oven at once. Do you see those charred papers? Well, those are the sketches and studies which I've burned at last."

"Ah, I'm glad you've done that," she said. "It would have been bad for you and him and her if he'd come and found them."

"He did find them," Beaudesart said. "He did find them — and — well — there was a scene."

"Of course," Mrs. Parflete said. "You couldn't expect anything else, could you?"

"No," Beaudesart answered.

And he added:

"But I can't burn the portrait. I simply can't. And he wouldn't want me to either. When I'd explained things a little to him and told him I'd burn the whole lot, he said I wasn't to. That's how the matter stands, at least for the moment."

Mrs. Parflete took up the portrait of Joan and smiled at it.

"I don't wonder you didn't want to burn that little eager face," she said. "Upon my word I don't wonder."

"Thank you," he said. "It's rather brickish of you to say that. All the same I wish I hadn't gone there and got mixed up in this affair. Then I could have helped him better in his trouble — whereas now it is more difficult."

She put down the portrait very gently, but kept her eyes on it as she listened to Beaudesart's account of the blow which had descended on poor Holbrook. At the end she said:

"Well, it would take a great deal to make me believe that she has run off with another man. It's much more probable that she has run off with an idea. If it was only

a man we could find him, and Mr. Holbrook could murder him comfortably, and that would be the end of them both. But you can't murder an idea."

"No, you can't murder an idea," Beaudesart said. "I said something of that sort to him and tried to rub it in about the Spirit of the Time. And he just scoffed."

"Ah, he'll have to go on scoffing until he has learnt his lesson," she said, shaking her head. "And a man like that won't learn it easily, Mr. Beaudesart."

"No, he's as obstinate as the devil, and nothing can move him," Beaudesart said.

"He's a fool, I think," she said. "Only a fool could have supposed that a little woman with a keen face and a pair of eyes like those in the portrait would continue to be content to be shut away from everybody and everything—and at this time in the world's history. As I have said before, the wonder is she stood it so long. But I suppose she wasn't ready."

"What made her ready, I wonder?" Beaudesart said musingly.

"Perhaps some mere trifle which no one will ever know," Mrs. Parflete said. "That's how crises generally happen, don't they? But she must have been working up to it for a long time."

"Since you appear to know so much about it," said a mocking voice, "perhaps you can tell me exactly how long she has been working up to it. It would be interesting to hear."

Beaudesart and Mrs. Parflete both started, glanced at each other in momentary anxious surprise, and turned to the little bedroom the existence of which and the occupant of which they had entirely forgotten.

Holbrook stood, a tragic figure, supporting himself with his hands on either side of the doorway. His face was deadly pale; but the expression on it was defiant and un-

compromising, and his eyes were lit with a living furnace of anger.

He disappeared without another word, his very silence accentuating his entire contempt.

CHAPTER XI

WHEN Joan woke up in the early morning, in the garden of the Smithy, she found she had been covered up with a warm rug, and that milk, bread and honey had been placed on a little table by the rustic seat. It touched her deeply that they had been taking thought for her; and for the first time it flashed across her mind that they must have chained the dog up inside the house so that no harm might happen to her. That man had guessed, then, that she would return. How had he guessed?

He had no means of knowing what Seth had told her about her father, nor how his words, treasured up in Seth's brain and now given to her for the first time, had created in her a heart hunger which had driven her back to the precincts of the Smithy. Was this man one of those who were so finely and sensitively constituted that the thoughts of others were wafted to them through some mysterious transmission? Probably he was, since by his own telling he was in touch with the veiled world, and conscious of presences and influences hidden from others. Well, she too had been in touch with that world, by vision, by dream, by sense, by thought—what did the name matter?

All that mattered was that she was in communion with her father once more, and that to her had been vouchsafed a revelation of love and understanding which would last her a lifetime. And oh, the immense load taken off her mind in being sure that though she had failed him, failed him utterly, he had believed in her all the same

and known that it was only the bondage imposed on her and not her heart which had estranged her from those she loved. It gave her new life to realize this: new joy in her freedom: new impulse to pass on and find her own path. It took the sting from remorse, that ruthless fang that tries to paralyze our powers of recuperation; and it weakened the resentment surging up now and again in great waves against him who had held her captive.

She sprang up. The sun was rising in an ecstasy of splendor, and around its pathway colors of gorgeous hue intermingled with tones of somber tint. And a lark soared, singing from gladness, as well it might. The dew drops glistened in the grass. The freshness of the morn enfolded nature. Joan, a child of Nature, bent down and touched with her hands and face, as though in greeting, the dew-laden carpet of green.

Then she addressed herself to the milk, the honey and the bread, and laughed contentedly, wondering what message she could leave for these good, hospitable and kindly people who had entertained the blacksmith's daughter in the way she best understood and appreciated. Now what sign of gratitude could she give when leaving the Smithy? She had not even a pencil with her, not so much as a single leaf from a notebook.

It struck her for the first time that she missed her writing materials. She had the habit of the notebook, the habit of making entries. It was true they had always been on the subject of the Renaissance, and she had done with that, thank goodness. But now she could write down other things—her own thoughts and feelings—things that belonged to her—to her own self—experiences—last night for instance—unforgettable of course, even if never recorded—and yet she would like to have a note of it. Well, she must buy a memorandum book directly she got to—

She stopped in the midst of a third slice of bread and

honey. Where, after all, was she going? What was she intending to do with herself? She couldn't, wouldn't stay in the village. She must go on and on. But where? It sounds absurd to say it, but this was the first time that she had asked herself that question seriously; and even now the burden of her future did not weigh on her in the least. She was still buoyed up by the joy over her escape and borne along unthinkingly on the wings of irresponsibility. But it did dawn on her now that she must make some sort of plan. And what plan?

She had more than three pounds in her pocket; and to her that seemed a vast sum, the possession of which relieved her of any need for anxiety. With three pounds in her pocket and freedom, the world was hers. She could go where she pleased, and do what she pleased.

Suddenly out of this vagueness sprang a definite idea, clear, distinct and familiar. It had been lying in wait at the back of her brain, ready for immediate adoption when the moment came. She would go to Beaudesart, tell him what had happened and ask his advice. She was convinced that he would understand. And it leapt to her mind that she had been conscious even at the time that Beaudesart had grasped the situation. Yes, she would go to him, and without delay. She remembered, too, that in the hour of desolation on the lonely moor, when she realized for the first time that by reason of her strange life she was cut off, isolated, without a single friend to whom she could pour out her trouble, she had seen, as if in answer to her cry of despair, a lightning glimpse of Beaudesart, a flashlight in the darkness of the night. So no doubts, no misgivings, no diffidences assailed Joan. His studio, Horace's old home, the address of which she had known for years, became her fixed and unalterable destination.

She finished off her last slice of bread and honey and drank a second glass of milk in one gulp. She decided

to hurry off at once to the station which was about five miles off. But how about that message?

Ah, a good thought. She would pick some of the flowers in the garden, do them into a posy and leave them on the table. That would be better than no sign at all; and at least they sprang from the ground on which she too had been reared, and in that sense were a link with her past life and her present self. She stooped down and gathered a few forget-me-nots and a blade or two of ribbon grass, and was weaving them together, when the sound of an opening door made her look up. And there in the porch stood her hostess.

She was a middle-aged woman, of commanding stature, with a splendid head, a fine open countenance and tender dreamy eyes. She wore a loose cloak of gray over a robe of the same color.

"Ah," she said, stepping down into the garden, "how glad I am that the blacksmith's daughter is still here."

"I was picking a few flowers to leave as a sign of gratitude," Joan said, coming forward. "Your flowers, it is true, but of the soil on which I was reared. It was the best I could do, as I hadn't a piece of paper or pencil or anything. And I was so anxious to thank you before I left."

"Must you go?" asked the lady of the Smithy, smiling. "Must you be off so early?"

"Yes," Joan answered, "I'm on my way to London."

"I was anxious about you," the lady said. "I was responsible for leaving you outside. We knew you would come back, and we went out to see. My husband wanted to carry you safely into the house, but I thought that was not fair to you, since you did not wish to enter the new smithy. And I believed you would probably not get any harm. The body has a way of taking care of itself when the spirit is searching for the trackless path. And you wanted to be free, didn't you —

free in your memories of your old home as you knew it — undisturbed by alien influences — unfettered by them? Wasn't it so?"

"Yes, yes," Joan said eagerly. "But how could you know this? Tell me how you could know this?"

But even as she asked the question, the need for its answer died away, for it was borne in on her that this woman with the wonderful eyes and shining countenance knew the secret heart of things by mystic intuition. And Joan was strangely, almost tremulously content that instead of a spoken word, a hand was laid on her head and held for a brief moment in a tender silence.

It was Joan who broke the silence.

"I have heard my father," she said in a low voice. "I have seen him. I had lost him, but now I shall never lose him again. Never. It has been a tremendous help to me to come here, in the way you have let me come. I can never thank you enough. I feel renewed, strengthened, buoyed up as if by an old friendship."

"The friendship of the dead," the woman said half to herself. And she added:

"Do you know those words from a beautiful poem:

"We all unknowing wage
Our endless fight,
By ghostly banners led,
By arms invisible helped in the strife.
Without the friendship of the happy dead,
How should we bear our life?"¹

Joan shook her head.

"No," she said. "But those are words one would never forget."

And later when she left the Smithy and was on her way to the station she kept repeating the lines:

"By ghostly banners led,
By arms invisible helped in the strife."

¹ The Liberated Hosts, by Evelyn Underhill.

When she arrived at the little station of S——, she found that she had more than an hour to wait for the train to London. She settled down on a bench and began to write in a notebook which she had been able to buy at a village store shop on the way. She was amazingly glad to make some entries again, and she bent over her task, eager and tense and entirely unconscious of the station-master, the porter and one or two travelers, who watched her and wondered what she was doing at that time in the morning, alone, evidently very engrossed and extremely self-contained. No one knew her, and so she remained undisturbed and detached.

This is what she wrote in the notebook:—

How delightful to have a notebook again. Never in my wildest dreams thought I should miss it. When I burnt those others, I believed I had done with such things forever. But then of course *they* were different. They did not contain so much as a comma, a semi-colon, a full stop of my own reflections and experiences. Nothing of me at all. But this is going to be my own record. Isn't it queer that I never kept one all these years? If I had kept one, I should have had a sort of private life of my own. But I suppose I wasn't ready, because I wasn't free.

Everything seems to have turned on that. If I'd been free, I could never have been content to remain cut off from my old home surroundings. I try, on and off to think how it happened, and I am quite bewildered. All that is clear to me, is that for seven years Horace was my whole world. And now he is not my world at all.

From being everything to me, he is nothing. It sounds brutal to say it, but it is positively an effort to think of him, at any rate for more than a passing minute. Other things seem so much more important and interesting.

And of course the freedom is intoxicating. Free — free — free — in mind, body and spirit.

No one's wife, no one's secretary, no one's servant, no one's serf. And the beautiful big world open to me, calling to me from all sides. What a mercy I'm still young, and that it's not too late to have a life of my own. There will be difficulties, I suppose; but nothing matters if one is going to have a real life of one's own. A life outside that barn house, that enclosure, that prison. And to think I didn't know it was a prison until a few days ago. And then suddenly — oh well, it wasn't only that hateful parrot that told me. Looking back now, I remember that on several occasions something has been knocking at the inner door of my mind. But that's of no importance.

The point is that I am free before it is too late, before I am old and toothless and without initiative. I'm ready for anything — except of course the life of a scholar and recluse. And as for my future and what it may bring — well, I shall always think of those words: —

“By ghostly banners led,
By arms invisible helped in the strife.”

That was a wonderful woman. I am glad that any one like that is living at the Smithy. She looked like a prophetess, a seer of visions, some one spiritual, some one set apart. I can never forget her, nor her kindness. Think of it — without a word, without a sign, she understood all I needed most before I came even. What was it she said? I was to be undisturbed by alien influences, so that I might be free for the memories of my old home. And I was free.

Over the trackless path I went and found my father. Was it a dream, was it a vision, was it a picture conjured up by my own heart hunger? I don't know. To me it will always be the most real thing that could ever

happen to me. The lifting of the veil — like the lifting of the mists on the mountains that I've read about — I must see that wonderful sight some day — just like that — and the memory of it more acute and real than the actual experience.

I don't know exactly how to put it — but surely the truest reality is a glimpse, however faint and passing, of the fulfilment of a hope, a longing of the heart and spirit. . . . Yes, I shall always love to think of those people at the Smithy. And I was to go to her in trouble, she said. And that's what the woman with the raven black hair said also. How different the two women. But I liked my woman with the raven hair. I wonder whether she took the black pearl after all. I hope she didn't. His mistress, was she?

And that was why old Keturah thought she was not a fit companion for her lambkin. Well, Keturah, I can tell you that your lambkin has associated with people far, far more immoral than the woman with the raven hair. It would make your own hair stand on end to be introduced to some of the characters in the Renaissance who've been my most intimate friends for years. But now we're beginning to understand that they are not so bad as they've been painted.

Perhaps it will be the same in the case of people like Miss Rachel Thorne. Anyway I liked her, Keturah, I liked her very much; and some day I hope to see her again. Never shall I forget when I woke up in the night in that great barn of hers, and knew myself to be at large. It was thrilling. But it is all thrilling — every bit of it — and it has only just begun.

That's so splendid. Only just begun — and anything can happen — anything except my return. That would be impossible — just as impossible, if not more so, than living in my little native village again — with Seth — dear old Seth — of course I forgive you — and Lizz and Mrs.

Gifford and all the rest of them. Quite impossible. No, it's exactly as it is in history. The past yields up to you something to go on with in the future. And with this possession, you are linked to it and yet free from it.

So now I'm on the road again, and I wonder where it will lead to. I wonder what Mr. Beaudesart will advise. I . . .

At that moment the train puffed slowly into the little station.

CHAPTER XII

IT was four o'clock in the afternoon. Horace, who was obviously ill, had refused to stay in and be taken care of. He had gone off by himself to the reading room at the British Museum, the one place in London where he felt comfortable and content, and could breathe freely.

"A strange health resort," Beaudesart had remarked. "And a unique climate. But probably just as good, if not better, than most of the remote spots recommended by the medical faculty. And cheaper, by Jove."

He was anxious about his old friend who seemed in an entire state of physical and mental exhaustion, and who, though torn in spirit about Joan, would not take any measures himself to inquire about her nor allow any one else to make inquiries.

"She has gone," he said stonily. "Let her go. She has got the freedom you and that Mrs. Parflete say the woman of to-day has to have. Let her use it. I don't want her any more than she wants me."

But he did want her, for all his grim boast of indifference; and at the back of his defiant and stubborn brain, new and unwelcome thoughts began to grope their way, summoned forth by one or two of Mrs. Parflete's remarks, the memory and meaning of which he tried in vain to ignore or repress.

Nothing could have wrung this admission from him, nor was there any sign of the faintest yielding in his manner or conversation.

"If I am an anachronism, I am an anachronism," he said. "So be it."

He was entirely unreachable; and apparently the only influence to which he was not impervious was the electric cooker which continued to have a curious attraction for him. Beaudesart, watching him fussing over it, smiled inwardly and gave silent thanks to Eridge the Prosperous for the gift which he had wanted at first to throw at his head.

"It's a sort of magical outfit, that's what it is," he thought to himself. "Warranted not only to cook your food, but to quiet your lunatics. No household complete without it; for every household has to have food and every household has its lunatics. So there you are."

And now, alone in his studio, he made himself a cup of tea, warmed some milk for Maria, and gave a sigh of relief that he was in undisturbed possession of his own premises and had the chance to ease the tension of his own nerves which had been greatly tried by the happenings of the last few days.

"Nice to have our home to ourselves again, Maria, if only for a few brief minutes," he said. "I think we will begin a new picture of that special kind which couldn't possibly be liked by any one during our nine life times. Such a restful thought, that. Gives us plenty of time and space, doesn't it?"

He got a canvas ready and chose a very long brush and begun to lay on thick daubs of red paint over the upper half of the canvas.

"It may be a sunrise, it may be a motor bus," he said. "It may be a drove of cattle. Time will reveal. And anyway, as Dr. Johnson said: 'It's something down on paper.'"

He was just becoming engrossed in his work and beginning to whistle softly, always his habit when happy and contented, when a knock came at the studio door, followed by a ringing of the bell.

Beaudesart looked in the direction of the door.

"Great powers, Maria," he muttered. "Don't tell me poor old Horace has come back from his health resort already. He couldn't have completed his cure as quick as that. I suppose I must let him in. But where's our private home life going to? That's what I want to know."

He strolled lazily, reluctantly to the door, opened it and started back in astonishment. He could not find words to speak. There stood Joan, with her wallet, her stick and her cloak.

"Mr. Beaudesart," she said eagerly. "I've come to see you."

"Of course, of course," Beaudesart managed to exclaim, as if it were the most natural thing in the world to receive a call from his friend's runaway wife. "Of course, of course. Do come in."

But to himself he said:

"By Jove, this means complications—and no mistake. Dangerous enough to have her portrait in the studio. But to have the little woman herself—by Jove, by Jove."

Joan stepped in. She glanced round the room, and her face lit up with pleasure.

"What a wonderful place," she said. "And these wonderful pictures. And that sunset. Exactly as I've seen it a thousand times on the moor."

"You really recognize it to be a sunset," he said excitedly.

"Well, what else could it be?" she asked gaily.

"No, what else could it be," he repeated, laughing happily. "But most people think it's something else—a pantechicon van, for instance, or a village pump or a railway station—or any old thing."

Joan laughed too.

"What sort of eyes have they got, I wonder?" she said. "I suppose then that they would call this pic-

ture, this Windmill by moonlight — they'd call it — well, say a study in fruit or a staircase in a Medici Palace."

"That's it," he said light-heartedly. "You've hit it. Anything would do — anything but the right thing. But how jolly that you know."

She had thrown down her cloak and stick, and forgetful of everything else except the pictures, she darted from one to the other, now with an exclamation of joy, now with some eager comment. "Seagulls fleeing before an aeroplane," held her simply entranced.

She had leapt, as it were, into a new world, and found her footing without a moment's hesitation. Beaudesart was thrilled, not only by her presence, but by her understanding and appreciation of his work, which no one hitherto had greatly admired or entirely understood. But here was some one at last to whom his meaning was revealed; and the joy of the artist in him as well as his intense pleasure at seeing her overflowed his whole being. He forgot the possibilities of Horace's rage and suspicions, forgot Horace's very existence, forgot that there was anything unusual or amazing or disquieting in Joan's sudden arrival. All he remembered was that here was that little wild bird whose image had burnt itself into his brain, here was a comrade who knew and understood his pictures. He purposely left her alone at first to single out what struck her fancy; for he was curious to see which subjects would be likely to arrest the attention of one so keen, so eager, so fresh.

He showed her some of the canvases hidden by others leaning against the wall; but he did not move her own portrait, which was by itself, apart from the others, with its face to the wall. He nearly did, but changed his mind, and instead opened some of his portfolios and showed her some of his sketches and unfinished studies. Her alertness and power of instant interest struck him as amazing, thrilling. With half a word she understood.

With half a glance she knew. Never had she been so happy.

"Why, you ought to have been a painter yourself," he exclaimed.

"Oh, no," she laughed. "I haven't it in me at all — not a trace of it. But you see, I love Nature. I've watched it closely, and you see all sorts of queer effects if you're observant, don't you? Now this little picture of the bushes standing out black in the fading light. Don't I know and love that sight well. I've seen it hundreds of times on the moors. If I could have painted it, this is exactly how I should have shown it — black — and blacker — and then the light getting dimmer — and then everything merged in darkness."

The time sped on. They were entirely absorbed, and it was not until Beaudesart heard an impatient knock three times repeated at the studio door that he came back to any realization of the difficulties which would be attendant on Joan's unexpected arrival.

"Heavens," he said, his face suddenly troubled. "That's Horace's knock. He's here, you know. He came straight to me. What on earth shall we do?"

Vague possibilities of hiding behind screens or in cupboards flitted across even his unconventional mind. They were soon dispelled by Joan herself.

"Do?" she repeated. "Why, nothing, of course."

"But you don't surely want to see Horace if you've left him, do you?" he asked.

"I've not the least objection in the world to seeing Horace," she answered. "Perhaps it's even better I should see him. Then he'll know I'm all right."

"But doesn't it strike you that he'll be furious at finding you here with me?" Beaudesart said.

"I'm sure I don't know and I don't care," she said with a curious sort of impersonal detached dignity. "I'm going to open the door to him."

"Oh, I say, look here, you're too rash," Beaudesart said, trying to get in front of her. "You'll face almost a madman in his fury, I tell you. You've half-maddened him by leaving him. You don't realize that, I expect. You don't know what a state he is in. Look here — let me come."

But Joan shook her head and opened the door herself. If any fear assailed her, she certainly showed no sign of it either on her face or in her bearing; and without a doubt it was this very fearlessness which paralyzed Horace, temporarily, at least, when they found themselves face to face.

"Ah," he said almost inaudibly. "I knew it."

He passed into the studio where Beaudesart was standing in the middle of the room, rubbing his chin and looking the picture of perplexity.

Horace took no notice of him, but sank into the arm-chair by the fire and quietly opened a copy of Hoby's translation of Castiglione's *Courtier* which he had been carrying under his arm. No one moved. No one spoke.

Then again he said:

"I knew it."

He went on fingering the pages of the book, with increasing restlessness, looking neither to the right nor the left. The tension became unbearable; and it was Joan who put an end to it.

"What did you know?" she said, coming straight up to him. "That you would find me here? Of course you would be likely to find me here. Who else is there in the world to turn to? No one. Not a soul. You made that impossible."

Horace got up slowly, closed the book and went slowly to the other end of the studio where he found the portrait of Joan. He brought it back and held it tremblingly before him. It was only the trembling of his

hands which betrayed his growing agitation; his face was almost diabolically calm.

"A marvelous likeness," he said with a short, low laugh. "An admirable likeness. Entirely faithful in every detail. And I was asked to believe it was a triumph of memory."

"And so it is," Beaudesart exclaimed with sudden anger.

"And I was asked to believe it was a triumph of memory," Horace repeated, turning to Joan. "Well, it would interest me to know the number of sittings you gave him."

In a flash of light Joan understood. She glanced at her own portrait, at Horace, at Beaudesart.

"Mr. Beaudesart," she said reproachfully, "why did you do this?"

"I couldn't help myself," he said, hanging his head. "Horace knows I couldn't. I told him all."

"All?" said Horace in a voice of biting scorn. "It would seem to me that I was told the barest fragment — the mere fringe of the story. But I knew. I knew. The portraits first. Then the wife. A faultless consecution. I repeat my remark. It would interest me vastly to know how many sittings you gave him here — in this studio."

"You're out of your senses," she said impatiently. "You know perfectly well that I've never seen Mr. Beaudesart at all except on that one day at home — and now here when I came to him for advice and help. I admit I've made a mistake and that I alone am to blame for this absurd situation. But if you think I've left you for the sake of going straight to another man, it only proves to me again that you've never really known anything about me, and that it's not worth while trying to tell you anything about myself. You'd never understand. Never. Never in your life."

She snatched up her cloak and stick and turned to Beaudesart:

"Forgive me for coming," she said. "It was stupid of me—and not fair to you. But I'll repair my mistake and be off."

The studio door had closed behind her before either of the men was conscious she had gone, so swift was her passage—like the flight of a wild bird which lifts its wings and immediately is lost to sight. Beaudesart caught Horace by the arm.

"Go," he said hoarsely, "go after her—you may never see her again—don't lose track of her whilst you have the chance—she may be caught in somewhere—caught in some trap, some awful net—you know the dangers that may be awaiting her—and she's so damned reckless—go after her whilst you have the chance."

"No," said Horace sullenly. "No."

"Then I'll go," Beaudesart cried, dashing forward.

"No, by God you don't," Horace said with sudden fury.

But Beaudesart thrust him on one side and rushed through the garden and up the street and into the main road where a motor bus was disappearing from sight. He raced after it—in vain.

Joan had disappeared and left no trace.

CHAPTER XIII

JOAN was in a way startled by Horace's accusations and insinuations, but her principal feeling as she dashed from the studio was relief at her escape, so terrified was she of being caught by any circumstances which might menace her newly acquired freedom. And she was at that moment far too detached to care greatly what any one thought of her.

"How senseless of me to have gone there," she said to herself. "No help, no advice Mr. Beaudesart could have given me was worth the annoyance of that scene. If I had had any sense, I might have known Horace would have gone to the only friend he has allowed himself to keep. Now what am I going to do, I wonder?"

At that moment a motor omnibus stopped; and she saw it was the same number which had brought her to that district. She jumped into it and settled down in the corner. She paid a threepenny fare because she gathered that it would take her a long way and give her time to think. It was getting late and she realized with half a laugh that she would not be able to spend the night in a barn or in a wagon of bundles of twigs! She also realized she was hungry, very hungry indeed. Food she must have, and that at once. When the bus drew up near a Lyons tea shop in New Oxford Street, she went in, studied the card and ordered a simple meal which she enjoyed all the more because it was the first meal she had ever ordered in a restaurant alone by herself.

And she liked the warmth of the place, the lights, and the people—every one of them she liked. They would indeed have been astonished if they could have known how much they all meant to that little thing sitting alone in her corner of observation, shut off until now from the intercourse for which she had been hungering. It was enough for her to see and to know that she too was taking part in their lives, momentarily perhaps, but none the less actually.

A sense of comfort and quiet happiness stole over her. She fell asleep, hopelessly asleep, with a smile of content on her face which disarmed the waitresses. It is true they kept a watchful eye on her; but they let her be for a good long spell, until at last they had to wake her and ask her to pay for her meal. She seemed so amused by her own misbehavior, that they too could only be amused and interested.

"How I've slept," she said. "I've been dreaming that this was a beautiful, bright, vast palace, full of shining presences."

"What an idea!" they laughed.

It certainly was an amazing idea to them, accustomed as they were to the rough and tumble of that rushing life in a building which was to them anything but a palace. But they were extraordinarily kind to this strange little person, and in answer to her enquiries, told her the nearest branch of the Young Women's Christian Association where she could get a bed for the night, and be safe and well sheltered.

There she went, and slept in a cubicle in a large dormitory, and nothing perturbed by the newness of her surroundings and the number of her fellow sleepers, slept through the night and rose refreshed and ready for any experience which might fall to her lot. A young woman in the stationery business advised her to go to the Labor Bureau hard by if she wanted to find work.

The manageress, she was told, was particularly kind there, and always anxious to help every one, especially those who "gave themselves no airs."

Off went Joan, as if to a party. Probably no one has ever entered a Labor Bureau as gaily as she. Even the sight of several sad, anxious-looking and worn-out applicants of all ages and conditions did not take away her courage and cheerfulness. She was deeply interested in what she saw and observed. She was out for life — and here was life — a pathetic, a heart-breaking side of it — she recognized that — but nevertheless life — with possibilities, limitations, expansions.

It did not cross her mind that she might drift into poverty, failure and hopelessness, and become like one of that group of faded, frail middle-aged women, or that tougher and rougher type of breadwinner grown grim and hard in the battle for existence. No, she ranged herself instinctively with the young, the upspringing, the capable, the competent. No thoughts for the future, no fears even for the present assailed her. She sat amongst strangers, probably the most contented creature there, and always uplifted by the joyousness of being with any kind of live people rather than the people in history books.

At last, after endless waiting, Joan's turn came, and she was shown into a small inner room where the manageress sat at a desk busily engaged in making entries in a book. She did not look up as Joan came in; and Joan had the opportunity of studying her fine profile.

"She is the image of Isabella D'Este," she thought.

She laughed silently.

"Always that old Renaissance cropping up," she said to herself. "All the same, she is like Isabella. But when on earth am I going to get out of the way of referring everything to that period of history of which I am dead tired? Yesterday I dragged in Leonardo da

Vinci when I saw Mr. Beaudesart's pictures, and here I am at it again with Isabella D'Este. I really must be more careful and give myself a proper chance of passing on."

The remembrance of Beaudesart's pictures held her for a moment.

"That was a golden hour," she thought. "Never shall I forget it."

Then a vision of Horace in his anger rose before her. She frowned and dispelled it. It was quite easy to dispel. Horace did not count at all in her present state of mind.

At last Isabella D'Este of the Labor Bureau lifted her eyes and saw Joan. She gave a slight, almost imperceptible start of surprise, pleased surprise, too; for here was something new, something distinctly resilient, entirely different from the procession of young, well-set-up promising applicants, and from the cortege of the saddened, disappointed and unsuitable. Joan's glance met her in spontaneous friendliness, and a smile broke over the manageress's face.

"Well," she said, "and what can I do for you? What sort of work do you want, I wonder? Typing, telephone, secretarial, shop, sewing?"

"I can't type, nor do shorthand," Joan said. "And I've never used a telephone. And I'm very bad at sewing — except the very plainest kind. Shop work, I suppose. Though I've never been in a shop."

"What have you been doing?" the manageress asked.

"I've been engaged in helping to write a history of the Italian Renaissance," Joan said.

"Then you want a post as a sort of Literary Secretary, I should imagine," Isabella said, looking puzzled; for the Italian Renaissance was by no means in her line, and she had no idea that she looked like one of its heroines.

"No, indeed I don't," Joan said almost fiercely. "That's just what I don't want. Anything but that."

"Why?" asked the manageress.

"Because I'm tired of writing, tired of books, tired of the very sight of a pen, tired of all that sort of thing," Joan answered. "I simply can't tell you how tired I am of it. I would rather do anything than that. I want active occupation—I don't mind how active, nor how little money I get—but I do want something to do in circumstances where I should feel I was alive and living in the present—not in the past—but in the present—and with live people."

The manageress, whose face had become a study of complete mystification, turned over the leaves of her reference book with a listlessness which did not seem to promise results. But she was evidently making some mental effort to cope with a difficult and unusual problem. She shook her head. Then she turned and looked at Joan, and an idea came to her. She opened another book and ran her finger down several pages until she found what she wanted.

"Here is something," she said. "A lady is needing some one to go to New York with her. She is scared about the sea journey. She has done it many times, but still has the belief she is going to be drowned. She won't take a nurse, nor a companion in the usual sense. And she only undertakes to pay the passage out and ten pounds. You see there are no prospects attached to the offer. It is really only suitable for some one who might be wanting to join friends or relatives in America, or take up a job awaiting her out there. So far I've not been able to suit her. She has rejected every one, though she had excellent references with them all. Would you like to have a try?"

"Yes," Joan said eagerly. "I should like it above all things."

"But mind you, there are no prospects," the manageress put in warningly.

"That's just what attracts me," Joan said, springing up. "No prospects. How splendid! No risk of being caged up anywhere! Think of it!"

"And what would you do when you got there?" the manageress said. "I suppose you've friends and relatives who would receive you? And failing that, money to keep yourself until you get work?"

"No, I've no friends over there," Joan said.

"Will you let me see your references?" the other said, putting out her hand automatically.

"References?" Joan said, her face falling. "Oh, I have none."

Isabella stiffened up, ever so slightly; but the stiffening up was there, physical as well as mental.

"Ah, I'm afraid that ends the matter," she said. "I can't undertake to send any one without references in search of a position. Have you no one who will speak for you?"

Joan thought of Keturah, of Seth's mother, of Seth, of Beaudesart, of Old Jacob, the shepherd, of Horace and of the raven-haired lady, and she laughed inwardly.

"No one who would be of the least use," she replied with a twinkle in her eye.

"I'm sorry," the manageress said, getting up from her chair as a sign of dismissal.

"Yes, I'm sorry too," Joan said, taking her disappointment bravely. "But it can't be helped. It was too good to be true. For think of it — America — a new land — new experiences in a new land. And no prospects — just what I should have loved. And some one frightened ordinarily, but who would not have been frightened with me. That I'm sure of. I should have loved that great expanse of ocean so dearly that she would have loved it too — those big splendid mountains of waves that I've hungered

to see even more than the snow mountains themselves. But it can't be helped. So good-by and thank you."

She had got as far as the door when the manageress recalled her, with a curious, half-ashamed expression on her face, as if she were a little shocked with herself for succumbing to some unwonted impulse which was "not in order."

"Look here," she said, "if you care to apply, I will give you a letter to Mrs. Walpole, stating at the same time that I know nothing of you, and that you have no references. It is an unusual thing for me to do. But sometimes one does do unusual things."

Joan brightened.

"That would be good of you," she said. "There would be no harm in trying. And as for references — well, of course I see that is a difficulty. The fact is, I know so few people. I've been married seven years and —"

"Married?" interposed the manageress.

Joan nodded and went on:

"And I could count on one hand the few persons I've met during that time. That is why I want to meet people now."

"And your husband?" asked the manageress. "What about him?"

"He's a scholar and a recluse," Joan said. "We've lived inside a history book."

"Where is he now?" the other asked brusily.

"Still inside the history book," Joan answered gaily. "But I've ventured out — and very nice it is. I had to have freedom or perish."

Very doubtfully the manageress wrote the promised letter, looking puzzled again, and more than half regretting her capitulation to the unusual. At the end of the page she added: "You must clearly understand that I have no knowledge of the type of person I am sending.

I merely send her in case you might have some knowledge, and might care to engage her on your own responsibility."

But after Joan had gone, she leaned back in her chair, twiddling her pen and thinking. Her memories returned to the days when she too had some dim idea of wanting freedom above all things in the world. And what had she won for herself instead? Fetters — fetters, inside, outside, on all sides, and worst of all the habit of hugging those fetters, of never being happy without them. And all the vision of life gone.

The procession of unemployed people, competent and incompetent, had to wait some time until she had put on her "mind-forged manacles" again.

Joan meanwhile sped on her way to see Mrs. Walpole at the Tudor Club, Piccadilly. As she went along, it began to dawn on her that she had not really much chance of getting work of any kind without some sort of reference; and it struck her suddenly that she was not dressed well, and that she had no money with which to buy clothes, and no outfit of the simplest kind. She told herself light-heartedly enough that she was really going on a wild-goose chase.

But no regrets, no real anxieties stayed her steps. What she had done, she had done. There was no going back to her cage. Never would she go back. She was quite decided about that. But as she took increasing note of the smart dresses and hats worn by women of all ages and conditions, it did occur to her that she would probably have to try for a sort of farm job, something where finery and feathers did not count.

"It may have to end in that," she said to herself. "But oh, those mountains of waves — that vast ocean — that wonderful expanse of sea and sky — I must see the glory of it all — always and always I've longed for it. I must see it."

Suddenly she began to think of the address to which she was going. The Tudor Club. Where had she heard the name of the Tudor Club? Ah, she remembered. She opened her satchel and found a card on which were printed the words, "*Miss Rachel Thorne, Tudor Club, Piccadilly.*"

"The raven-haired woman," she said, with a happy laugh. "Keturah's darling! But of course she won't be there. Keturah could not spare her!"

A few minutes brought her to the Club, and she went in and waited in the big hall for some one to attend to her. None of the officials hurrying here and there concerned themselves about her. They probably thought she was a little messenger girl or a servant waiting for an answer. And she might have waited indefinitely, but that the lounge door opened, and into the hall strolled the raven-haired woman herself, elegant, beautiful and always with that curious, elusive charm of manner and bearing. She stopped short when she saw Joan, and there was no mistaking the welcome in her voice and on her face.

"You little wild thing!" she said joyously. "So you've come to visit me. How entirely nice of you."

"Well, that's the funny part," Joan said. "I haven't really come to visit you. But it is splendid to see you. I've come to apply for a situation, and this was the address given: a Mrs. Walpole, Tudor Club."

"That old crazy crank!" Rachel Thorne exclaimed. "You never mean you're going to cross the Atlantic with her."

"I don't think it matters with whom I cross the Atlantic, as long as I *do* cross the Atlantic," Joan laughed. "I've always hungered and hungered to go for a sea voyage. Only I don't suppose for a moment she will have me. You see I've no grand clothes. I never thought of that till this moment."

"And you needn't now," Rachel Thorne said. "She herself looks like the seediest old female tramp I've ever set eyes on. You're turned out like a Parisian in the zenith of fashion compared with her. The chances are she'll think you are far too fashionable!"

Joan laughed and the raven-haired woman laughed too. These two incongruous comrades were evidently delighted to be together again. Rachel Thorne soon set the machinery of the Club in motion. A boy was sent flying all over the premises to find Mrs. Walpole and deliver the letter from Isabella D'Este of the Labor Bureau; some one else was instructed to telephone to a friend of the raven-haired woman that she could not keep her engagement, and some other attendant was despatched to order tea and cakes to be served instantly in the lounge.

Joan followed Rachel Thorne with her eyes as she moved about in languid and yet purposeful fashion. She was deeply interested to see her in this new setting, away from that lonely country house, away from Keturah, away from the guinea-fowl run—yes, and away from that hateful man who brought the black pearl and was the cause of that strange and garish scene. But there was the black pearl itself, set in a ring on the raven-haired woman's finger; and as Rachel Thorne poured out the tea, she saw that Joan had recognized the treasure which she had rescued from the guinea-fowls.

She flushed a little. She was uneasy. She was ashamed of herself and of it.

"Yes, I'm like that, unfortunately," she said in a low voice. "I wanted it, after all. I coveted it. But now I've seen you again, I hate it—hate it—and myself—and him—and everything that he stands for."

Joan was silent, chiefly because she was thinking.

"You don't sit in judgment on me. I feel you don't," Rachel Thorne said wistfully. "But you wouldn't be

like me for all the freedom in the world — would you?"

"I don't know what I should do, nor what I should be if those were my temptations," Joan said simply. "They're not. That's all."

"Ah, you're large of spirit, child," Rachel Thorne said.

At this juncture the boy arrived with a message asking Joan to come at once to Mrs. Walpole's room. Off she hurried, leaving Rachel Thorne staring in front of her, held by thought.

Joan was received in a large bedroom by a shabby, middle-aged woman who did not correspond to Rachel Thorne's description of the very seediest old female tramp to be seen on the roads, but certainly had made considerable progress in her impersonation of that rôle. Several trunks already packed gave the indication that a journey was to be undertaken at no distant date. Joan's heart bounded with hope and anticipation.

"You have no references, I hear," Mrs. Walpole said, pointing vaguely to Isabella D'Este's letter on the mantelpiece.

"No," Joan said cheerfully. "None."

"Well, at least you come with no false ones," Mrs. Walpole remarked. "That's something in your favor."

There was a pause, during which Joan embarked on the steamer and was already being thrilled by the joys of that ocean voyage.

"More than probably we shall be drowned," Mrs. Walpole remarked. "Do you mind running that risk?"

"No," Joan answered. "Not in the least. Of course I'd rather not be drowned yet, but if it comes, well, it comes."

Rachel Thorne's Crazy Crank shuddered and shivered as if she felt herself already enveloped by the cold cruel waves.

"Yes," she said, "it will come. Of that I am certain.

My father was drowned, my mother's sister was drowned, my brother was drowned, I shall be drowned."

Joan remained silent. She realized now that she had to do with some one who was crazy and cranky. But this fact made no difference to her eagerness. For the sake of crossing the Atlantic, she would have undertaken to put up with a whole corps of crazy cranks and drown with them if unavoidable.

There was another pause.

"How about clothes?" Mrs. Walpole enquired. "I suppose you have trunks-full like all the others. This absurd dressing up to be drowned has always struck me as entirely ridiculous."

"I have no clothes except what I stand up in," Joan said.

Mrs. Walpole wheeled round suddenly and stared at her with interest and some faint show of approval.

"You look remarkably fresh and clean in what you have got," she said. "You look as fresh as young spring leaves. And none of that horrid smelling powder and stuff on your face. Quite a relief."

With a little humorous gesture as if she too saw the fun of the situation, she summed up:

"No references. No clothes. No powder and paint. No scent. No fear of being drowned. No false pretenses. Very well, we will go on Saturday."

"You don't mean it!" Joan exclaimed joyously. And when Crazy Crank nodded, Joan, oblivious of all formalities and consequences, threw her satchel into the air and caught it.

"I've hungered and hungered to see the ocean," she cried. "Oh, I shall love it. If it takes me to its arms, let it — let it."

There were not many preliminaries. Joan was told to be ready on Saturday morning at eight when she would be called for at the Young Women's Christian Associa-

tian; and the only detail given her was the name of the steamer, the *Minnetonka* of the Atlantic Transport Line. She floated downstairs in a dream of delight and found the raven-haired woman waiting for her and smoking a cigarette.

"She has engaged me," she said, her face bright with excitement. "Isn't it a piece of luck?"

"I knew she would," Rachel Thorne said. "She may be a crazy crank, but she's not a silly ass."

"We're off on Saturday," Joan continued. "Who would have thought that this would have been my destiny a few days ago — when you came and found me in that barn and were so kind to me?"

"Kind? Nonsense!" said Rachel Thorne. "Why, I was feeling bored to tears, and I should have welcomed even an alligator as a diversion, much more, therefore, a bird — a wild bird it's true, but with no power of eating one up."

Joan laughed.

"Well, it was a happy little visit for me," she said. "My very first visit to any one. Self-invited, a bedroom like a cathedral, a feeling of freedom large enough for a whole nation and a raven-haired woman who —"

"Who regretted more than she can ever say that something ugly in her life put a sudden end to the visit," Rachel Thorne interrupted. "I shall always regret it. There are moments when I hate myself intensely — and when I share the all-comforting Keturah's opinion of me — and that moment was one of them."

"And a raven-haired woman," continued Joan as if she had not heard the interruption, "who asked no questions, took me for granted and headed the list of my new friends. One needs to have been utterly cut off from outside companionship in order to know how much the beginning of outside companionship counts and means in a new life."

"So that if I'd been an alligator you would have accepted me with joyfulness," Rachel Thorne said.

"Precisely," laughed Joan. "But you see you weren't one. You were a raven-haired woman, the dispenser of hospitality to tramps and a rather unsuccessful doctor to guinea-fowls."

"Those poor guinea-fowls!" said Rachel Thorne with a twinkle in her eye. "Another one died the next day; and your friend Keturah looked on grimly and unconcernedly, more grimly than usual, if possible, for she was furious with me for having been the cause of your departure. And of course she would have been equally furious if I had been the cause of your protracted presence. But there, I forgive her. The old crosspatch evidently loves her pet lamb. It's her one good point — that and her apple turnovers. I will say that for her."

Then Joan spoke a little of her old home, her old life, her old associations and Keturah's share in them; and it was evident that she eased her heart in dwelling on the past. Of her present she said scarcely a word, and Rachel Thorne did not ask a single question. But before they parted that evening after a spell of happy easy companionship, Joan spoke of her husband.

"I want you to do something for me," she said. "I must let my husband know that I am going to America. It has just struck me that I ought to let him know. And I don't wish to write. I have the feeling that I needn't explain to you. I don't want to explain."

"Of course you don't," Rachel Thorne said. "Why should you?"

Joan nodded.

"He is at No. 6 Oak Road, St. John's Wood," she went on. "He is with a friend there, a friend whom he has known for years and who —"

She broke off. She suddenly thought of Beaudesart's pictures and of that delightful time she had spent with

him. Her face lit up with eagerness and enthusiasm.

"Oh, he paints the most wonderful pictures," she exclaimed. "I shall never forget them. I shall never forget 'Seagulls fleeing before an aeroplane.'"

Her smile died away. Her brightness faded. Rachel Thorne, observing her, wondered.

Joan continued without a trace of her former vitality:

"What I want you to do, raven-haired woman, is to go and see my husband, tell him you've seen me, that I went to my old home after I left your house, and that I have sailed on the *Minnetonka* to America in company with Mrs. Walpole. I don't want him to know until three or four days after I have started. Do you think you could and would do this errand for me? It would make everything simple for me."

But even as she spoke, she remembered with a poignancy of realization what sort of woman her raven-haired acquaintance was, and she regretted her request. Her face showed it; and Rachel Thorne saw the signs and guessed her thoughts.

"You need have no fear, none at all," she said. "You're doubting whether I know how to keep faith, and whether I'm a woman to be trusted with another woman's man. Well, I don't wonder you doubt."

"But I would like you to try me. Indeed I would. I will undertake to do your errand as honorably as if I were the whole of the Young Women's Christian Association boiled down into a solid jelly. All the same, if you'd prefer a safe messenger like Keturah to go instead, some one whom you know you can trust without any qualms whatsoever, Keturah it shall be."

"Your errand shall be done by her or by me — whichever of us you prefer. Your husband, whoever he is, and wherever he is, shall be told that a little, little wild bird

has gone off for a spree, to spread her wings — not in the usual eloping way — not with another man — nothing of that nature apparently — but with a crazy old crank who believes she is going to be drowned. A strange kind of spree. It does not sound exhilarating to sophisticated ears. But I suppose it spells freedom of some mysterious importance or you wouldn't be so keen about it. Anyway, your message shall be given, either by Keturah or me. And you won't offend me if you choose her. You never could offend me — why, I couldn't tell you. I don't know myself. Perhaps those delicate and dying guinea-fowls are responsible for the bond between us. So which of us is it to be?"

They were alone in the lounge, and there seemed to have come a sudden lull in the activities of the Club and in the traffic outside: one of those mysterious suspensions apt to occur in the seen world when some crisis is taking place in the unseen, the spiritual world. The two women, products of entirely different circumstances, and each a stranger to the other one's plane of life, sat confronting each other in a silence charged with tragedy. Rachel Thorne, without knowing it, awaited her chance to take one imperceptible step onwards in her spiritual evolution; and Joan, with equal unconsciousness, held it in her power to give her this chance and thus win for herself the golden opportunity of striking a blow at the traditions of distrust and doubt which have sealed many a woman's doom in the past.

Would she give the chance? Would she strike the blow?

She hesitated for one brief moment. The scene of the black pearl rose before her. She saw the man whose type she had loathed to her heart's core, and from whom she had shrunk with feelings of relief both physical and mental, thankful to escape immediately from surroundings which had suddenly become odious to her. She remem-

bered how she had instinctively compared him with Horace, and how she had been half angry with herself for an outburst of pride in Horace by contrast, yes, even in the face of that absurd accusation against her which he had manufactured in his absurd rage, and which could not even make her indignant because she had a nature and temperament entirely at variance with that charge, and he knew it and had ever respected and guarded it.

She recalled how she had tramped along the road pondering over Keturah's words of warning, and wondering how it came about that this raven-haired woman, so beautiful, so winning and apparently so refined, was able to accept and enjoy a relationship with that odious man. She remembered too the exact spot on the road, near an old tree struck by lightning and a whole mass of hips and haws and honeysuckle berries in the hedge, when that motor car dashed up to her, and the raven-haired woman, mercifully alone, had leaned out and said: "If I could be of any use some time or other, you could write, you see. But perhaps you wouldn't ever want to do that now you know — why — why Keturah dislikes me."

Joan's own answer echoed back to her: "Yes, I should."

All these diverse thoughts and memories rushed into Joan's mind and rushed out again, vanishing like the details of an outlook lost in a larger horizon.

She held out both her hands:

"I choose you," she said. "I choose you and trust you." The lips of the raven-haired woman quivered a little.

"You little wild bird," she said, half whimsically, half sadly, "when you're being drowned with your crazy old crank, remember for your consolation that you did the raven-haired woman a good turn by trusting her."

CHAPTER XIV

BEAUDESART and Holbrook, left alone after Joan's sudden departure and disappearance, were at first stunned and then furious with each other. Beaudesart was beside himself with rage that Horace by his insane insinuations had been the means of sending Joan out of reach, out of ken, to fall a prey to evil circumstance, and Holbrook remained keyed up with suspicion, jealousy and the madness of a fixed idea. Beaudesart's keen anxiety on Joan's behalf encouraged Holbrook in this mood, and he refused to take any steps to find her. But in his secret soul he suffered intensely from a reluctant anger with himself and from wounded pride over Joan's abandonment of him, over her indifference to him and her entire detachment from him.

It made him wild that he did not count, that she looked past him, always past him, that she put no importance on what he had said, that she had shown no anger, that she had merely gone—apparently without a regret—merely gone. Gone where? He did not care where. Let her go. If she fell a prey to any one, let her fall a prey. Not an inch would he move to prevent it.

And not an inch did he move in any sense. Being at bitter enmity with poor old Beaudesart, one would have thought he would have left the studio at once. Not at all. He stayed on as if it were his home, hostile, brooding, sullen; and Beaudesart had no heart to turn him away.

"I can't let the damned old fellow go back to that lonely barn," he said, when his friends remonstrated

with him. "He'd drug himself to death; and then I should never have another moment's peace on this gay earth. No, he's best here."

So Horace was not asked to quit. He sat all day huddled near the fire and asked no questions of Mrs. Parflete, Beaudesart and Hereford himself who were all engaged in the search for little Joan. He heard their talk, he listened to the recital of their failures, he made no comment, he offered no suggestion, he showed no outer signs of interest. And yet Beaudesart knew that there were moments when he did care bitterly and was vainly groping in the dark to find a way of escape from his prison of stubbornness.

Hereford had come up to the scratch splendidly and had put Beaudesart in touch with all the machinery of police search.

"For once you're useful, old chap," Beaudesart said, "for once instead of bullying those wretched victims of yours in the Court who are probably much better than you or me, you're doing something really valuable and human. Cheer up. I have hopes of you yet. You may yet land in the dock."

But although his words were gay, his heart was heavy. He too longed for little Joan. That brief glimpse of her in his studio had but added to the love with which she had unconsciously inspired him. Before she came to his studio, he had found it next to impossible to exorcise her haunting little presence. Now he found it entirely impossible. He heard again every word she had spoken, he saw again her every gesture of delight over his pictures. With his mind's eye he saw her leaping about from one painting to the other; and he laughed, laughed with happy remembrance of that glorious bit of companionship and freemasonry of understanding which no one and nothing could take from him. She could not take it herself — no — not even though she looked past him

too, looked past him in the same way as she looked past Holbrook. He had no illusions about that.

She was out for freedom, out for a spreading of her eager wings too long furled; and he knew well enough that her visit to him meant nothing more to her than some indefinite sort of vague attempt to seek vague advice as to the direction of her vague course. If she had known other people, perhaps she would have gone to them instead. But the fact remained that she had come to him, stayed some few brief moments and then vanished, like a spirit.

Vanished where? Ah, that was the torturing question which left him no peace. He searched for her endlessly, and always in vain.

He came back to his studio, tired out and disheartened on the third afternoon following on Joan's departure for America, threw himself into the armchair and dozed a little, whilst Horace as usual crouched over the fire, grim and sullen, secretly yearning to know whether there were any news, and yet preferring to remain in ignorance rather than make one human sign of interest.

They were a curious pair. Perhaps the strangest feature of their present relationship with each other was Beaudesart's entire disregard of the reason of his old friend's hostility towards him. It simply did not affect him at all; for he knew that nothing he had done or planned had brought about Joan's visit. It was chance. Fate. He had had no finger in it.

Probably he guessed that Horace in his sane moments believed this and acknowledged it secretly to himself. Anyway, some deep-rooted understanding between them and the habit of old companionship made it possible for them to live their life together even in these unpromising and unpropitious circumstances.

It was about five o'clock that afternoon when there came a ring at the studio front door. Horace of course

took no notice, but let poor tired-out Beaudesart drag himself up to answer the summons which had suddenly become somewhat imperious.

He opened the door to Rachel Thorne and was so overcome by her beauty, that his drowsiness took to instant flight as he muttered to himself:

"By Jove — by Jove."

Never had she looked so beautiful. Her raven hair was dressed to perfection beneath a faultless picture hat; and she wore a black gown costly in its austere simplicity. Her elegant, whimsical charm of personality, always there, took nothing from a certain indolent stateliness of bearing, which was none the less impressive because it was lacking in rigid formality.

She had the appearance of a personage destined by fate to sit for a portrait by a faultless master hand. And indeed Beaudesart leapt to the conclusion that she had mistaken his studio for that of the famous painter at the end of the road; and he was prepared to direct her to the right house. But to his surprise she said:

"Are you Mr. Holbrook?"

"No," he said, shaking his head. "Thank goodness I'm not."

"But he lives here?" she said. "This is his house, isn't it? I think this was the address given."

"Well, I suppose it is his house now," Beaudesart answered with a laugh; and he added to himself:

"It certainly isn't mine."

Aloud he said:

"Come in. This is my studio, and Holbrook is staying here with me, his old friend."

She followed Beaudesart and saw Horace sitting huddled by the fire. He did not turn round nor even look up. It seemed more than possible that if the Queen of Sheba herself had been announced, he would have remained immovable and impervious.

Some such thought came into Rachel Thorne's mind, and she laughed. She had not seen any one so humorously depressing for a long time. She turned to Beaudesart with an amused smile which almost spoke the words: "What an exhilarating companion!"

"If that detached gentleman is the gentleman in question," she said, "perhaps you would deliver to him at some distant date a message with which I have been charged by that little wild bird who, I understand, is his wife."

"A message from Mrs. Holbrook," Beaudesart repeated eagerly; and Horace suddenly roused himself and fixed two searching eyes on her.

"Do I understand you know where she is?" he said slowly, with an intonation of voice decidedly hostile.

"I can't say I know at this exact minute her exact position on the Atlantic Ocean," Rachel Thorne answered; "but she left three days ago for New York, on a boat called the *Minnetonka*. She asked me to come here after three days had elapsed, and tell her husband that she was all right, that she had been to her old home and that she was going to America. That was the whole message."

"Ah, her old home," Horace exclaimed with sudden fury at the very mention of Joan's home which he had always hated. "She went back there, did she? Her plans all arranged—a secret life of her own. I might have known it—picked up an old lover there—I make no doubt—oh, it's all quite clear to me—and then off to America."

Rachel Thorne laughed. She really could not restrain herself. She thought of Mrs. Walpole, and laughed.

"That's the funny part of it all," she said. "She has not gone off in that sense. I could understand *that*, of course."

For this one brief moment she was off her guard in

manner and intonation; and both men glanced at her and understood.

Instantly she readjusted herself and went on:

"No, she has gone off with a crazy old crank of a woman who lives at my Club — oh, Crazy Crank is harmless enough, I assure you, and wouldn't hurt a herring and is entirely taken up with the one and only idea that she is going to be drowned. Of course she never will be. People like that never are. But that is the sort of abandoned person your wife has gone off with; and if I know anything of her, she'll manage to have a happy free time even out of such amazing material."

"And pray what do you know of her?" Horace said contemptuously. And he stared at her with searching scorn. Beaudesart asked the same question, silently, with a puzzled expression of countenance.

She blushed under their scrutiny, but nevertheless answered with a quiet, disarming dignity:

"I know nothing of her. You may be at ease about that. Nothing — and yet something. I found her one morning in the barn of the house where I stay for week-ends in the country. She'd been on the tramp, I understand, and she'd crept in overnight and slept there. She seemed to think it was a sort of cathedral. So little pleases her."

A spasm of pain passed over Holbrook's face. He knew these words to be true. So little had pleased Joan, so little had she ever demanded. And the memory of this characteristic smote him to the heart.

"That was our first introduction," Rachel Thorne went on. "I sent her in some breakfast by old Keturah, the old servant who proved to be a friend of hers. No doubt you know about Keturah. And then I joined her. And she told me that she was tired to death of books and bored to extinction with something she called the Renaissance. When she realized I had no acquaintance with the

Renaissance and no passionate zeal for any books, she settled down and we had a happy time together until . . .”

She paused then and waved her hand as if in dismissal of the black pearl and that man and his motor car.

“Until she left me,” she added. “Beyond seeing her at my Club once or twice, this is the amount of my intimacy with her. I know no details about her; for not being the Charity Organization Society, I asked no questions. Her plans and prospects are as much a sealed book to me as that very Renaissance. But I’m quite sure that the crazy old crank won’t let any harm come to her except drowning. Entirely sure. As her message says, she’ll be all right. And, as I said, the name of the vessel is the *Minnetonka*, of the Atlantic Transport Line. So now, having done my errand, I will take my leave.”

She rose and glanced around the studio.

“What very interesting pictures,” she said. “What delightfully unusual pictures. Ah, how curious this one, ‘Seagulls fleeing before an aeroplane.’ I never saw anything like it before. No wonder that little wild thing was entranced with them.”

Suddenly she caught sight of Joan’s portrait leaning against the wall, this time with its face turned towards the room. With a quick movement of eager interest she went straight up to it and took it in her hands.

“How like her,” she exclaimed, “how astonishingly like her! The very image of her. The same eagerness, the same burning intensity. The very image of her. It is amazing how you have caught her expression. How well you must understand her. How I would love to have it. If I had it, I should always be throwing away my black pearls. I know I should. I’d simply love to have it.”

She turned impulsively to Beaudesart.

“Is it possible for me to buy it?” she said. “Is it

possible? Do tell me. Could you by any chance part with it?"

"Take it," Beaudesart said, thrilled by her appreciation. "If you really want it so much, take it as a willing gift."

"Oh, but I can't do that," she said, smiling with pleasure. "I don't suppose you want to part with such a wonderful bit of work in any case; but you certainly mustn't be allowed to give it up in that way."

"Please accept it," Beaudesart said excitedly. "I could do a thousand more."

The next moment he could have bitten his tongue out for the madness of his indiscretion.

"Yes, he could do a thousand more," Horace repeated in a tone of voice that cut like a knife. "And each one as life-like, mind you, each one the very image of her. And without sittings, mark you, without a single sitting—from memory—after seeing her once. And I'm asked to believe that."

Rachel Thorne shuddered. She looked from Beaudesart to Horace, and from Horace to Beaudesart. She recalled Joan's excitement and expression when speaking of Beaudesart's pictures. She remembered how her face had lit up at the very thought of him, and how all her brightness had faded when she spoke of the message to her husband. Rachel Thorne put two and two together. So it was just the old ordinary eternal human complication over again—the husband and the lover—the lover and the husband.

But stay—was it? No, it wasn't. Habit of thought might suggest this view to her, but instinct told her that the little stranger she had found in her barn could never have helped of her own free will to bring about that situation. For a moment it is true the question did flash through her mind whether she had been asked to keep faith with Joan on account of Beaudesart or Hol-

brook. But the doubt perished at its birth. Nothing even in her own tendencies and impulses could make her believe ill of Joan.

If she could have believed ill of her, a beacon light in a new horizon would have been put out for Rachel Thorne forever.

She turned to Horace with scorn and indignation which had something noble in it.

"You fool, you poor fool," she said. "No wonder she took to her wings. And just imagine—it takes a woman like me to be able to tell you about a woman like her. A breath of fresh air. That's what she is. A little wild bird. That's what she is. If she haunts us, it is because the memory of a breath of fresh air is never forgotten. It is what the world lives on. And the thankfulness for it comes to every one of us—yes, even to a woman like myself. An aspersion on her. A suspicion of her. Madness. That's what I call it. If I believed it, I'd—I'd never throw away the black pearl—never. But because I don't believe it and never could, I throw it now."

She tore off her glove, clutched at the ring and threw it into the fire. It sank deep into the heart of the glowing coal.

The men stood watching Rachel Thorne, wondering at her, quelled by her, each in his own way. It was borne in on them that this had been a symbolic act and the fire had been an altar and the black pearl a sacrifice.

Then Horace, without a word, slunk away into the inner room; and Beaudesart at a sign from Rachel Thorne opened the studio door for her. She paused a moment and turned towards Joan's portrait. He fetched it and gave it to her in a grave silence which seemed to last for centuries.

"Take it," he said at length. "You liked it. Take it."

"Yes, I will take it now," she said gently. "It will do me good to have it. And it might — it might do you harm."

He bowed his head.

"The harm is already done," he said in a low voice — "if you call it harm. For her, there will be no harm."

She glanced at him and saw the sorrow in his eyes and the pain on his kind face. Some words of sympathy rose to her lips, but she checked them, and passed out, impersonal, distant, detached, having delivered her message and kept faith.

PART II

CHAPTER I

THUS Joan found herself on board the *Minnetonka* bound for New York, and whither afterwards she knew not and cared not. As far as she could make out, her principal duty was to prepare herself for instant drowning; and she gathered the impression that Mrs. Walpole was likely to be bitterly disappointed if her fixed idea did not become an indisputable reality during this voyage. Joan was intensely amused, and owing to her happy habit of taking things lightly, she was able to deal with this strange frame of mind in a sensible and sporting spirit.

This was her first conversation with Mrs. Walpole. She knocked at her cabin door and found her seated on the sofa looking the very picture of resigned desolation, with the life preserver by her side. Her cabin trunk was not unpacked, and Joan said:

“May I not unpack for you?”

“Unpack?” she said. “Why should I unpack? We shall go down. It is waste of time. I’ve been trying on the life preserver. It is in good condition. The one I had on the last journey was a ridiculous affair, only suitable for the rubbish heap. Have you tried yours on?”

“No,” Joan said.

“Well, bring it,” Mrs. Walpole said.

Joan darted off to fetch hers, and with a gay air allowed herself to be inducted into the mysteries of the adjustment.

"I take this one personal precaution," Mrs. Walpole said, looking at her gravely. "And then I resign myself to my fate, as you must. Now you can go on deck if you wish."

"But what can I do for you?" Joan asked.

"Nothing," she answered.

"But why have you brought me if I can do nothing for you?" Joan said.

"We perish together," Mrs. Walpole replied. "There's the advantage."

Joan was silent. A great pitifulness flooded her, the first feeling of unselfish concern she had experienced since she had dashed away from home. Here was this wonderful free life, here were all these chances of enjoyment and interest of every kind, and here was this poor creature, unable to get anything out of the glorious opportunity. Joan knew only a direct method of approach and she used it at once.

"Do come up on deck," she said. "Please do. You can't imagine how delightful it is there. They asked me about your deck chair, and we've placed it in a sheltered sunny position. And mine's alongside. And I shan't leave you alone for long; but I shall run about and come back to tell you all about the interesting things happening every moment. It's endlessly interesting. So are the passengers. And aren't the stewards clever in the way they run up and down stairs as though they were fairies — sea fairies! And fancy, I've been on the bridge, and I've had a look at the engine room and the wireless house. And I've found out where they put up the log, outside the library, you know. And I've been watching the seagulls circling in the sun. How lovely they look — like shafts of gold — don't they? And as for the sea — how it changes, doesn't it? Every minute some new splendor. You can't think how happy I am. I wish you could be happy too. I feel so bright and well that I'm

sure nothing would be a trouble to me. Upon my word, I believe I could even work at the Renaissance — and put Lorenzo dei Medici and César Borgia and the whole lot of them into the log without an impatient thought. I suppose you keep a log. Here's mine. You see I've begun it already. I've started off with seagulls and a submarine — the first submarine I've ever seen. Isn't it fun? Do come up with me."

Mrs. Walpole glanced at her and at the notebook. She shook her head.

"I never come up," she said. "But if you're going to stay on deck, take my rug and my warm coat."

"Well, I'll run down and bring you the news as often as you'll let me," Joan said.

As she dashed out of the cabin, Mrs. Walpole looked after her just a little longingly; but after this feeble spasm of interest, gave herself up to her usual habits of melancholy resignation to a fate which was bound to come, sooner or later. Not that she had much opportunity for prolonged and uninterrupted expectation: for Joan, who seemed to be immune from threatenings of sea-sickness and from difficulty in moving about freely, descended at frequent intervals to make her reports in the cabin of doom. She took it for granted that Mrs. Walpole wanted to know all details.

"There are lovely soft lights in the sky," she said. "Exactly like the soft gray coloring on a dove's breast."

Or:

"We've just passed an enormous Liner. Such a monster she looked even in the distance."

Or:

"There are three racehorses on board. Such beauties."

Or:

"It's blowing up a bit rough. But nothing to matter. It is wonderful to see how she forges ahead."

Or:

"A man has climbed up one of the masts to do something or other to the pulley working the crane."

She never came down without some item of information; and it was obvious that her eagerness, her happiness and the natural tendencies of her bright and assimilative mind were, even in these first hours of the journey, opening to her a new world into which she entered with ready footsteps. But out of her old world, that old world which presented so little meaning to her in this phase of her life, she had, much to her own amusement, kept the habit of the notebook, instilled into her by Horace himself. But there was no entry about him in it, no single allusion to what she had left behind.

On the third day of the voyage a miracle happened, and to the utter astonishment of all hands on board, from Captain to cabin boy, Mrs. Walpole came on deck, walked up and down on Joan's arm, and was finally tucked up in her chair by the deck steward, who could scarcely believe his eyes when he saw her smile, nor his ears when he heard her laugh: for she had made many journeys on that boat, and her characteristics were well known.

"It's that little dashing woman that's done it," remarked the chief officer. "She'll be taking her up to the crow's nest soon!"

Joan did not get her as high as that, but it is a fact that she succeeded in dragging her crazy old crank down to the engine room and the stokehole, and that she coaxed her into the steering house and easily enough into the Marconi house. Mrs. Walpole indeed, much to her own surprise, took many excursions on that boat, accompanying her ruthless conductor with a half-dazed, half-pleased expression on her face which was the funniest part of the whole performance.

She generally ended in the deck chair, placed where

she could see the passengers playing games on the lower deck, or watch with Joan the varied activities of the crew. Hour after hour she sat there, in fair and foul weather, not changing in the belief that her sea doom was imminent, but only in her method of meeting it. But of course, without knowing it, she was infected by Joan's delighted acceptance of all conditions.

For the wild bird loved the moods of the sea. She loved it calm and kindly, with its depths of glacier blue and its white surf and spray mingling with the sunshine in opalescent magic. She loved it in tender converse with the fading sunset lights, and with the soft, gray woolly clouds floating near its surface. She loved it fierce and tumultuous, with its huge mountains of waves, threatening, menacing, merciless. She loved it in its alliance of fury with wind, rain, hailstones and snowstorm. She loved it when it had lulled its angry passions to rest and, penitent and chastened, received the healing benediction of the moonlight. She saw it during that voyage in all its phases. It was as if the sea had whispered to her: "*You trust me, and therefore you shall know me as I am.*" For had she not said of it, "If it takes me to its arms, let it take me"?

She was torn between her joy in the sea and her eager interest in the working of the ship and in the passengers themselves, those dear and funny people who always seemed to her to be making a fuss about something which didn't matter in the least.

She liked them all: the silent little Japanese, the lady with the wondrous hat which was never removed, nay, not even for sleep, the widow going out to marry an old sweetheart in Port Arthur, the cattle rancher bound for Arizona, the young English fellow returning to British Columbia, the naughty American child, six years of age, who would obey no one on board, not even the Captain, the photographer who was planning a third visit to the

Cañon of Colorado to take a fresh series of pictures, and many others including a rather grave-looking man, said to be a publisher, who was always poring over typewritten MSS. which invariably sent him to sleep.

Joan had snatches of talk with them all; but one day she came dangerously near having a sustained intellectual conversation with the weary publisher. She happened to be alone on deck, and seeing a book in a chair, she took it up and found it was one of the medieval towns series, *Ferrara*. She opened it by chance at Chapter VI, The City of Ercole, and read on, absorbed in the history of the times she knew so well. She came to this passage:

"In this moment of gloom and sorrow the voice of Ferrara's sweetest Quattrocento poet died away in a cry of lamentation. Boiardo, still Governor of Reggio, was utterly overcome by the heavy care of providing for the passage of the French through his province and by his anguish at the spectacle of their cruelty."

Some one spoke to her, and she looked up and saw the publisher by her side. He was obviously the owner of the book; for he half put his hand out for it, as if claiming it, in a gentle and unassuming way. To his surprise she broke out into an extraordinary Renaissance torrent of eloquence, showing an amazing knowledge of the literature, the politics, the historical significance of that period. She spoke of the people as if she had known them all her life and showed a grasp of their characters and aims which was truly amazing, and a continuity of thought which was only possible to a real scholar.

Suddenly, in the midst of an attack on Lodovico il Moro's policy of instigating the descent of Charles VIII into Italy, she stopped short, flung the book from her and dashed off, murmuring to herself: "*The parrot—the parrot again.*" She was discouraged and dismayed with

herself, and only recovered her cheerfulness when the second mate came to heave the log, a proceeding which she never failed to witness. The publisher, mystified and interested, sought her out again and tried to bring up the subject of the Renaissance. But Joan remained stubbornly dumb on this theme. She was ready enough to chatter about other things: the speed of the ship, the perpetual spring cleaning and painting, the forests of machinery, the wonders of the steering wheel, the feeding of the furnaces and the fury of the last hurricane. But about the Renaissance not an unwary word did she let escape.

And one day he asked her:

"Have you registered a vow never to speak again about Savonarola and Ercole and Boiardo and Lodovico il Moro and all the host of them?"

"Yes," she answered, a stubborn expression coming into her face.

Again he ventured, but she dodged him in the same way that she had dealt with close-pressing inquiries from her old friends in her old home; and he learnt nothing from her. She enjoyed foiling him and had many a silent chuckle over his discomfitures.

At last, after a further vain attempt to draw her, he could not resist saying:

"Why do you evade the subject of the Renaissance, which I am sure interests you deeply?"

"Because I'm not here to talk about the Renaissance," she said. "I'm here to drown. That's my mission."

She laughed as she spoke, and he laughed too, for every one on deck knew of Mrs. Walpole's peculiarities. He did not court another defeat after this encounter; but he took an early opportunity of giving her his card and telling her that he would be pleased to show her his publishing offices and book store. He believed secretly that if she were to find herself in an atmosphere of books, she might once more let herself go and reveal more of that

historical knowledge with which she had dumbfounded him and aroused his curiosity about herself and her environments. She took the card and looked at it; and a smile of recognition broke over her face.

"Why, of course you published that splendid edition of Castiglione's *Courtier*," she said, forgetting all her precautions in her enthusiasm over this fine tribute to a glorious Renaissance work.

"Come and see the plates," he said.

And this time he knew he had scored.

They were nearing the end of the journey, and people were beginning to speak of the friends whom they were expecting to find at the dock to meet them. Every one apparently had friends awaiting them; and it did begin to strike Joan that this wonderful experience of the voyage was almost over, and that she would be alone and friendless in a foreign land, and that perhaps she had come on a mad escapade — mad but entrancing. But not once did she regret her adventure, and never a sign of even passing concern as to her plans and prospects did she show to Mrs. Walpole who made no inquiries about her purposes. Crazy Crank's mind indeed was chiefly taken up with the astonishment of not having been drowned.

"Again I have escaped my doom," she said grimly.

"But it will come next time. It is bound to come."

The last night when Joan took her down to her cabin, she put an envelope into her hand.

"Here is your fee," she said. "You have made my journey very pleasant for me. It is the first time I have ever enjoyed a sea voyage. I almost begin to feel I should not mind if I were drowned. Do you remember that day when we lay in the trough of the ocean? You seemed so pleased, you strange little thing, that as I held your hand, I became pleased too. And I said to myself: '*After all she's right. What does it matter?*'"

She paused a moment, and then, with an automatic return of her resigned depression, murmured:

"But all the same, I shall be drowned. I have no illusions to the contrary. And the fact of my minding less makes no difference to the fulfilment of my fate. You understand that, I hope."

"Of course," Joan answered gravely, for she had never once shown any sign of amusement to Mrs. Walpole over her fixed idea; and as she went to her cabin, she had feelings of regret that she had ever laughed with others over what was a cause for pity and not for fun. She was still absorbed in this thought when she opened the envelope half absent-mindedly, and found not one ten-pound note but five ten-pound notes. Fifty pounds. She had never seen so much money in her life. It did not please her. It terrified her. She ran with flaming face to the stateroom where her willing feet had dashed so often to give the latest news to that desolate heart.

"It must be a mistake," she said. "But if it isn't, and you mean it for me, I can't take it. No, no, impossible. I've never had so much — never seen so much. I should hate it. And what could I do with it? Nothing."

"You might stay in New York until I return from California," Mrs. Walpole said. "And then you might go back with me. No one else shall go back with me. No one."

"Of course I'll go back with you if you want me," Joan said. "But I couldn't take that money. It would chain me up. And I can't be chained any more. I won't be chained. Our bargain was ten pounds and the joy of the journey. And I've had joy overflowing — that's what I've had."

"But you've got to live somehow," Mrs. Walpole said. "I don't suppose you have any money of your own. Did you think I should leave you in the lurch in a strange country? It's true I didn't mind about the other crea-

tures. But they had plans — and references. And you have none. Well, references don't matter, but plans do — in the end."

"But I have a plan," Joan said. "I shall find work. And I have no fears. The world is before me. I have my freedom, ten pounds and the chances of adventure in a new country. I couldn't take the money. I don't want any one's money nor any one's help. I want to use my own wings and take my own flight, and if I come to destruction, come to it in my own way. But I shan't. I shall find my way. I am as sure of that as you are sure that — that you will be drowned."

"Well, you could not be surer," Mrs. Walpole answered solemnly.

So she had to leave it at that, but to ease her mind, she gave Joan one or two addresses of old friends living in Greenwich Village and Washington Square, and the name of a boarding house kept by people she knew in East Eighteenth Street.

And now on a beautiful crisp morning, with brilliant sunshine and a dazzling clear blue sky, they had entered New York Bay, and pushed their way slowly into the Harbor, breaking up, as they went, the sea of ice which with the magic touch of the sun, seemed like a vast field of diamonds, each stone vying with the other in luster and loveliness. In the distance the great buildings piercing the heavens appeared as majestic palaces of a pure whiteness, rising out of the sea, with their thousands of windows glistening in the golden rays of light. A fairy scene, indeed, to be remembered for all time.

No garishness, no deafening roar of the City, no rush and restlessness of the life, no after consciousness of its materialistic import can ever destroy this first impression of an idealism from which, after all, the United States sprang to existence — the idealism of freedom.

CHAPTER II

THERE were three telegrams awaiting Joan.

“Money awaiting you on application at City
Bank. HOLBROOK.”

“Money sent to you to Merchant’s Bank of Canada.
“HORACE HOLBROOK.”

“Keturah insists sending fifteen pounds savings for
lamb, National City Bank. RAVENHAIR.”

When they were brought to Joan on deck, a wave of sudden longing and remorse swept over her, and she fled from Crazy Crank and the crowd of passengers watching the vessel being wondrously maneuvered into its appointed dock, and walked up and down alone on the deserted upper deck. She had forsaken old Horace, wounded him, angered him, maddened him, and yet he had taken thought for her and sent her the protection of his money in a far-off land.

His kindness nearly choked her. But why had he sent it to two banks instead of one? Of course, that was just what he would do. He would suddenly feel he had not sent enough, and would rush out in that queer excitable way which she knew so well, and probably double the amount in order to ease his anxiety. (It was only some time afterwards that she learnt that Beaudesart had cabled one amount, and Holbrook the second, and that neither of them had told the other what he had done.)

And then dear old Keturah’s concern for her too. It

touched her beyond words that Keturah should care for her pet lamb as much as that. How she must have sacrificed her pride and stubborn dislike of the raven-haired woman to ask her help in arranging this matter. She could see the grim reluctant expression on Keturah's face, and the amused, whimsical look on the raven-haired woman's, as if she were saying: "Keturah is positively courting me. Isn't it frightfully funny? But of course I shall do as she asks." Of course she would. (Only long afterwards Joan heard that Rachel Thorne herself had sold a family picture, cabled the money and invented the legend.)

So Joan was not destined to want. It was true that when her first spasm of regret and gratitude had worn off, she fiercely repudiated the idea of any help from Horace or any one else. Nevertheless it was a dimly realized relief to know that in any great extremity of need, she could go to old Keturah's bank and borrow those pathetic savings till she had righted herself. She gave the news of the cablegrams to Mrs. Walpole.

"Two from my husband and one from my mother's old friend," she said.

It was the first time she had mentioned her husband; and Mrs. Walpole started.

"I did hear something about a husband," she said, "but I thought you had buried him, as the saying goes."

"No," Joan replied, smiling. "He has buried himself and me. But I've emerged. I had to. I needed air and space and freedom."

"Yes, one generally does when one has been buried alive," Mrs. Walpole said thoughtfully.

She did not pursue the subject further, for it was not possible to her to concentrate on any one's affairs except her own, though she was able, if she chose, to take a passing and practical interest in any one who chanced, on rare occasions, to appeal to her strange nature. She

had shown this in wishing to provide for Joan's maintenance, and she showed it again when she insisted that Joan should accompany her to the Irving Hotel, so that on arriving in this strange new land she might not feel herself to be utterly alone. She even wondered whether she should not take her to California. But she rejected this idea.

"If it were a sea journey, it would be different," she reasoned to herself. "But I am not likely to meet my doom on any railway."

So her impulse was overcome by the tyranny of her fixed idea. But she remained uneasy on Joan's account and delayed her departure for several days, wondering vaguely at intervals what she could do to protect this little, proud, wild bird who had won her way into her heart by her very joyousness. She was glad to linger a little while. Joan's enjoyment of her new experiences refreshed and amused her; and the Irving Hotel, to which she had been coming for years, Gramercy Park, the Metropolitan Life Building Tower, and the many interesting features of that interesting district took on a new meaning for Crazy Crank. She even found herself beginning to be thrilled by the building operations going on hard by; and perhaps if the chief officer of the *Minnetonka* had been near at hand, he would have ventured to prophesy that that little dashing thing, as he called Joan, would have soon lured Crazy Crank up the scaffolding, into the very center of the noise and activity!

On the fourth day her difficulties about Joan were solved in a satisfactory fashion. She discovered that an acquaintance of hers, a Miss Katherine L. Byrne, an investigator for a foundation for scientific social research, was staying in the Irving Hotel whilst her apartment in East Sixteenth Street was being redecorated. Crazy Crank spoke of Joan and introduced her. Miss Byrne said she had a small bedroom in her apartment which

was not going to be used for the present, as the woman who occupied it had gone for six months to Europe. If Mrs. Walpole wished, her little friend could come there.

The matter was arranged at once. Mrs. Walpole paid for the use of the room for three months, deducting by arrangement with Miss Byrne a small nominal sum which, so it was arranged between them, Joan would pay, and thus believe she was paying the whole. Miss Byrne promised to put her in the way of getting her food cheaply, and without interfering at all, to see to it that the little English stranger came to no harm.

Mrs. Walpole, having made this superhuman effort at mental concentration and concern, and now entirely eased of her unprecedented anxiety on behalf of an Atlantic companion, went on her way to California. She seemed reluctant to go, and Joan said:

"Must you go?"

"Duty," Crazy Crank answered vaguely. "Duty."

Her parting with Joan was characteristic.

"I shall return, my child," she said. "I shall return safely, because it is on the journey back to England that I shall meet my doom. And if you are still here, you will come and perish with me, will you not?"

"Yes, with pleasure," Joan said with a twinkle in her bright eye — "unless indeed I perish in a taxi-cab earlier. I thought we were done for many times on our way from the docks — didn't you?"

"No, my child," Mrs. Walpole answered solemnly. "Not in that way shall I perish. I admit many people might. But not I."

And she added, with a touch of humor which sometimes crept unawares into her depression:

"I am sure you will be quite safe from that danger, because this American method of dangerous locomotion in doubtful taxi-cabs is costly. You will not be able to afford such luxuries with your ten pounds and your free-

dom. For I gather you will not use that money sent by the husband whom I thought you had buried."

"No, anything but that," Joan said emphatically. And she meant it.

Her first night alone in Miss Byrne's apartment in East Sixteenth Street was rather miserable, in spite of her repeated self-reminders that she had got what she wanted, and that she was now, as she believed, entirely on her own resources, in a new country, on new lines, hampered by no one, hedged in by no compelling circumstance. She did not realize at the time that the *Minnetonka* itself, Crazy Crank herself, had been links with her old life. Those links were now broken, and she was alone amongst strangers.

During the few hours she lay awake, a chill struck at her heart; and indeed she would not have been human if she had not been able, for all her passionate hunger for independence, to taste of the bitterness of desolation. It was mitigated, no doubt, by the relief, conscious and still more unconscious, of being delivered from a spell. But it was there. And if tears could have come easily to Joan, there would not have been an inch of dry space on her pillow. But this was not her way. She lay instead tearless, with open eyes, staring in front of her, thinking, wondering, asking herself whether this freedom for which she had hungered was worth this loneliness, whether freedom meant loneliness, whether this awful sense of utter desolation, entire detachment, was a passing phase or a permanent state for all those who like herself had cut the net and escaped. But not for a bare moment did she long for the life she had left. She said to herself a thousand times that the desolation was unbearable. But she said to herself an equal number of times that her bondage had been still more unbearable. Freedom unbearable, bondage unbearable — what was a poor wretched human being to do?

Suddenly, in the midst of her difficulties, her thoughts returned, straight as a dart, to her old home and to the elemental things and early values belonging to her childhood's days. She was soothed, cradled to sleep and claimed by happy dreams. She saw her father at the forge. She heard the loved sound of the hammer on the anvil. She heard him say: "Here comes the pride of the forge—the brightest little spark ever beaten out of steel." She laughed in her dream.

In the early morning, strengthened and confident once more, she remembered those words which were implanted in her mind:—

"We all unknowing wage
Our endless fight,
By ghostly banners led,
By arms invisible helped in the strife.
Without the friendship of the happy dead
How should we bear our life?"

CHAPTER III

JOAN took kindly to the city of New York and wandered up town and down town, delighted with the sky-scrapers, equally interested in the rich fashionable people and the ordinary every-day ones, and thrilled with the foreign populations of the various foreign quarters. Nothing perturbed her. The thundering noise of the elevated railways, the deafening sounds of steam drills in gigantic building operations, the mad rush of mobs and masses of workers to catch a train or a car, the crowding and crushing of every one together in the cars, the apparent hurry and scurry of life: all this energy and activity struck a chord which responded in understanding sympathy. Here was vibrating, pulsating life if you liked; and she took her fill of it as one who had been starved of real sustenance, but now had the chance to be nourished in a way that would build up her strength.

Her very eagerness gained friends for her; and two or three of Miss Byrne's intimates were extraordinarily kind to her, after the manner of Americans. She was not the type they knew. She was neither smart nor assertive nor insistent, yet she was not dowdy nor humble nor retiring. Her directness appealed to them. Her detachment from circumstance, obviously quite unconscious, impressed them probably more than anything about her. Miss Byrne always maintained that she was a spirit. Miss Etta M. Trask, the clever and attractive factory inspector, said she was too human to be a spirit, that she was a bird — a wild bird resting on its flight, somewhere, anywhere.

Miss Gwendolen A. Richards from Vassar, now a newspaper interviewer, declared she was a Suffragette resting on her mission — not a wild bird or a spirit. Mr. Homer S. Perry, in the publishing trade, was convinced that she knew nothing about books; and he was supported in this view by Miss R. B. Emory, a librarian, who reported that when she had suggested one day that the Englishwoman in the course of her many wanderings about the City should visit the New York Public Library, the only answer she got was: "No, thank you. No libraries for me. No books for me."

And then, no doubt feeling that she had been rude, she had said:

"I love the outside. It is just splendid!"

But they were all busy people and had not much time to focus on her even if they had wished; and most of her time was naturally spent entirely alone.

Miss Byrne kept her promise and put her into the way of getting cheap meals at such places as Childs' and initiated her into many contrivances for living economically by buying certain things from the delicatessen shops on Third Avenue, such as potato salad, baked beans, thin slices of cheese and canned corn. And with oyster stew, coffee and poached eggs, bread, butter and oranges, hot tomato soup and a plate of crackers for ten cents at a drug store, malted milk and chocolate with an egg "shaken" into it and a plate of crackers for fifteen cents, and an occasional dinner at the "Greek," Joan got along very passably on about seventy-five cents a day.

People were all the more willing to help her, for it was evident she was not blessed with superfluous dollars. For one thing, she always appeared in the same coat and skirt and the same hat, scrupulously neat, never awry, but obviously not of recent date.

And she walked everywhere. That of course would seem to most American women the very acme of impe-

cuniosity. Miles and miles did she trudge, with no set purpose, except the delight of free experience and the wonder of mixing in crowds and seeing the rush of active life. She tramped along an astonishing number of squares and avenues and streets; but Central Park, with its lake and wild parts, its woods and squirrels, got very near to her heart, and she loved, too, Riverside Drive and the Palisades opposite.

Yet she was equally happy wandering down town, and amused herself for hours walking along Broadway towards Wall Street, and down to the end of the Island to the Battery, where the Aquarium held her riveted. And, needless to say, she had an enthusiastic joy in the big buildings which she was never tired of studying. The Woolworth thrilled her to the very depths of her being. Some times she took cars; but she was scrupulously careful in that respect, for it was necessary for her to save all her money, which was rapidly diminishing; and she was already beginning to wonder in a vague way how she would be able to replace it. She was always fiercely determined not to touch Horace's money, nor Keturah's either if she could avoid this disgrace. She felt that it would be a disgrace to go off on an adventure like this and then rely on some one else to pay for it. No, she would stand on her own feet somehow; meanwhile she was having a perfectly glorious time, buoyed up with the bracing air, joyous in the sunshine and keenly interested in everything she saw and observed.

One day when she was in Fifth Avenue, she stopped in front of a gorgeous book store, attracted by the frontispiece to a book which recalled to her immediately one of Beaudesart's pictures: the same coloring, the same distinctness rising out of vagueness. It was not his work. No, she was sure of that. It was another name altogether, but the same school, which, so she and Beaudesart had decided together, would have puzzled Leon-

ardo da Vinci or Sandro Botticelli. She laughed at the recollection of that happy little quarter of an hour. How exhilarating it had been, big and thrilling, like the joy of the great waves, the great spaces!

Suddenly the siren whistle of the fire engines cut short her reflections, and she turned to look at the splendid white horses, three abreast, dashing forward at full speed with their fire engine and its amazing hook and ladder fifty feet long. It was a sight that had fascinated her from the very beginning of her wanderings; and it held her now.

"What magnificent creatures," she said aloud.

"Yes, you're right," said a friendly voice which she knew. And glancing round, she saw her publisher friend, Mr. Richard W. Post, on the threshold of the great book store.

"Have you come to visit me?" he asked with a pleased smile.

"No," she answered. "I didn't know this was your office."

"Well, come now," he said, opening the door for her to pass in. "You are the very person I wanted to see. I have something I wish to show you in addition to those Renaissance plates for Castiglione's *Courtier*. Do you remember we spoke of them?"

"Yes," Joan said, torn between the desire to see them and the suspicion that she was being caught in a trap.

He saw her momentary hesitation on the threshold, and laughed secretly.

"Surely," he said with a twinkle in his eye, "the mere fact that you were not drowned, shows that you have been mercifully preserved for a worse fate, doesn't it?"

She laughed and followed him into the great room, a great hall, in fact, which was the retail department of this large publishing business in which he was the principal partner. And at once her interest was aroused.

Here was something quite new and unexpected. She had always thought of publishers as Horace had described them to her — unapproachable supermen shut off from the outside world by endless corridors, and encased in a series of iron safes of privacy.

But here apparently they lived and moved amongst their employees, their books, their telephones, their typing machines, their proofs, their authors and their public. It was a stimulating atmosphere; and Joan entirely forgot that she was tired of books and of everything to do with books. She almost danced from one department to another, listened eagerly to details told her by the men and women workers themselves who did not seem in the least nervous in the presence of their Chief, and finally found herself in a little room upstairs, where Mr. Richard W. Post was supposed to work if he felt inclined for privacy. The deserted air of the retreat testified to its neglect. Joan knew enough about "the spirit of place" to feel sure that no one worked here and no one ever had worked here. Downstairs was the real place, in the center of activity. She felt this so strongly that she said impulsively:

"Do let us go down to the real place where things happen."

"All right," he said with a laugh at her quickness of instinct. "It is quite true that things don't happen here. But I wanted to show you those plates of Castiglione's *Courtier*. Here they are."

He laid them before her: Baldassarre Castiglione, Leonora Gonzaga, Vittoria Colonna, Beatrice D'Este, Federico of Urbino, Elisabetta, Duchess of Urbino, Cardinal Ippolito dei Medici, Bibbiena and many others: all those people whom she knew so well and from whom she had been trying in vain to escape. She looked at the beautiful reproductions in a silence which was only partly stubborn. For after all, they had meant a great deal to

her; and even as one's emotions rise up unbidden, unwelcome, at the sight of old friends discarded or discarding, so little Joan's feelings of enthusiasm and tender interest were stirred to instant life.

"My old, old friends," she said to herself, and her thoughts flew to the lonely barn house which they had peopled for her with their bright, gracious personalities — that lonely barn house on the moor — Horace's house, with its atmosphere of philosophic thought, historic research and literary expression — the scholar's atmosphere — Horace's atmosphere. That was their rightful home. Not here. It was absurd to try to think of them as being here, or anywhere except there. Insulting, preposterous.

She turned from the table.

"This isn't their home," she said in a voice of quiet scorn which seemed to come from a far distance.

The publisher stood staring at her. He had half expected and hoped for another Renaissance outpouring; but instead of that, he had this revelation of her intense caring, for it was certain that these pictures had moved her in a mysterious but unmistakable way.

He did not know what to say; so he wisely said nothing. He took her back to the center of activity, where she soon recovered her eagerness, her interest and her good spirits. And when he was satisfied that all was well with her again, he told her that his firm was preparing a series of Renaissance books, and that there was some work to do in connection with them which was being delayed in consequence of the sudden severe illness of the gentleman who was editing them: his proofs to correct, his notes and introductions to run over, and two or three new introductions and several synopses to write.

"If you are not busy, could you do this bit of work for me?" he said. "You must remember that you have given yourself away to me about the Renaissance. Why you know it, and how you know it, is not clear to me.

But you evidently do. No one could speak of these people in the way you did that morning on the steamer unless steeped in their histories and adventures."

"I was off my guard," Joan said brightly. "That's all. Please forget it."

"But why should you be off your guard?" he asked, puzzled but amused. "There isn't anything specially disgraceful in knowing the history of the Renaissance, is there?"

"No," she answered with a laugh, "nothing to be ashamed of, but something to be tired of — utterly, utterly tired of. I'm doing my best to forget it! And here it comes cropping up all the time. I don't get a chance. I thought every one who came to America got a chance."

He laughed.

"Some people might think this a chance to get in with my firm," he thought to himself. But wild horses would not have made him say it to this little independent thing. Instead he said:

"Then I'm to understand that you would rather not undertake this little piece of work?"

"Much rather not," Joan replied.

"In fact you refuse," he said, frowning a little.

"Yes," she said. "I'm sorry to vex you. But I can't accept your kind offer. I can't really. I wish I could. It would be a lovely place to work in."

"Oh, well, if you can't, you can't," he said not unkindly. "That's your affair, isn't it? And I mustn't be the one to interfere with your chances in this land of freedom, must I?"

She slipped away quickly after this episode, partly because she was fearful lest he might return to the subject, and partly because she realized that the harmony of their companionship had been impaired by her refusal of his offer. Yet he was kind to the end, took her down

to the cellars to see the stacks and stacks of a popular novel standing in readiness to be sent all over the States, and presented her with a book which he said could not possibly annoy her. It was called *Life on an Ocean Tramp*. And in parting he invited her to call in again if she felt a sudden craving for books.

But although she was grateful for his kindness, Joan decided inwardly that the premises of Messrs. R. W. Post & Co. were a "danger zone," and that she must steer clear of them if she wanted to proceed safely on her own track towards her own goal.

But apparently it was not her luck to be able to avoid danger zones. One day she drifted unconsciously into another peril. She had been asked, through the friendly introduction of Miss Byrne who was increasingly interested in her, to a dinner club which met at one of the little old-fashioned houses in Greenwich Village, a most curious and interesting corner of the City, reminiscent of the old world, with a lingering touch of old Chelsea, old Hampstead, perhaps. Every night six or seven men and women took their meal together, forming thus a sort of family or community, and contributing of course equally to the expenses of the food, the cook and the Japanese waiter boy.

Joan learnt that this was the solution of the housekeeping difficulties of isolated workers in a certain set, and that the sensible custom was gradually spreading in other directions. Certainly it seemed to suggest economy, a saving of trouble, and above all a security against personal loneliness, a fate to which no ordinary American man or woman can easily be reconciled.

The room where this particular group dined, was small, rather cozy for an American room, and it had an English fireplace, a Persian cat and a round dinner table. The Japanese boy had arranged on the table a few freesias in that wonderful and simple way known only to the

Japanese, and a single silken Union Jack had been introduced into the scheme as a greeting to the English guest, so she might feel at home under her own flag.

She did feel at home. She sat amongst them as if she had known them for years, and no eager child ever enjoyed her first party as much as Joan enjoyed this, her first party. She thought all the people adorable. She loved the easy camaraderie between the men and the women. She was delighted with the absence of all strain and all tyranny of individuality.

They all interested her equally: the woman botanist engaged on a stupendous Californian Flora for the State of California, a school teacher, a woman probation officer at the Night Courts, a young man lawyer and a woman lawyer, an editor of a New York paper, a settlement worker, a welfare supervisor, a professor from Columbia College, an inspector of factories, and last but not least, her own acquaintance, Miss Byrne.

Two or three of the company had been to Europe, and the others were planning to go. They were all anxious to hear something about England and they asked her many questions which she could not answer. When she could not tell them about clubs and the great woman movement, and the outlook of the Labor Party, strikes, social reforms, and newspapers, magazines and cathedrals, she felt that they must think her hopelessly ignorant. And she knew she was ignorant. But if she didn't know these things, she didn't, and that was the end of it. But when they began to speak of the countryside, then she came into her own, bounded into her own, leaped into her own. She told them of the far-stretching moors, and of the glory of the heather, and of her old home "The Smithy," three hundred years old, and of her father the blacksmith, and of old Jacob the shepherd with whom she had tended the sheep, and of the sheep-shearing, and the haymaking and harvesting, and of the

old barn, "Never ending," where the frolics were held in the old days and where the fiddler fiddled until his arm nearly came off, yes, and his legs too, so recklessly did he sway about. She held them entranced with the simple but graphic picture she drew of the England they all loved, deep down in their hearts.

"We must go to 'Never ending,'" they said. "You'll have to take us on a round trip there!"

She laughed as she thought of the sensation she and they would cause in that little old village when they trooped across the village green and past the pond with its three huge elm trees and so onwards and onwards until they reached "Never ending." She could almost hear Seth say in his slow drawl:

"Joan, my lass, what be these furreigners you've brought with ye to your old hoame?"

Now who would have thought that from peaceful scenes like these she would immediately be precipitated into another danger zone? But she was. The school teacher, hearing that she had always lived in the country, asked how she could bear to be in a place like New York.

"New York is splendid," Joan said staunchly. "And the high buildings are simply thrilling. So daring and defiant. Like 'Never ending' in another direction. It is just as if they were saying the whole time: 'We've got to have space somehow or other. We've got to have it. We've got to have it. And as we can't have it on the ground, we'll have it in the air!'"

"And what do you make of them when they're lit up?" asked the woman lawyer. "Don't they remind you of Venetian palaces rising out of the water? They do me."

"I suppose that is what they are like," Joan said. "But of course I don't know. I've never been to Italy."

"Well, you'll have a lovely time when you do go," the school teacher said. "I spent six months in Italy two or

three years ago, studying the Italian Renaissance. What a subject! I'm never tired of it. I read every book I can find about it."

She mentioned Symonds, Burchardt, Vernon Lee, Creighton and a whole string of names; but when she had come to the end of her list, Joan sprang up excitedly, her cheeks flushed, and her eyes piercingly bright.

"One day," she said, "there will be a far greater book than any of these — with deeper insight, larger grasp, with scholarship wedded to humanity and philosophy interwoven with history. I don't mean to say these others are not wonderful works. Of course they are. But they've had their day. We know more now. Old records have come to light, and new values, new judgments, new appreciations spring up as a result. And then there is our own changing outlook. Take for instance the new attitude towards Machiavelli."

She plunged into a discourse on the aims and ideals of that amazing statesman as now interpreted by modern historians. Her little audience was as astonished as the grave publisher on board the *Minnetonka*. But they knew her now for what she was — a scholar — and when she suddenly remembered what she was doing, and broke off ashamed and confused, the school teacher turned to her and said enthusiastically:

"Why do you leave off, little English scholar? Go right on. I guess I could listen for hours to such talk as that."

"I'm not a scholar," she said, shaking her head. "I'm just a parrot — nothing but a parrot — in spite of all my hopes, nothing but a parrot."

They asked her what she meant. And she told them in a few simple words. Somehow she found it easy to tell these people who were free themselves, not hide-bound by tradition, not kept down by an old code, but upspringing, elastic, receptive. Details of course she did

not give them; and no word of disloyalty to her historian husband passed her lips. But they gathered that she had had seven years of undiluted, unmitigated, unadulterated Renaissance, and they only wondered that she had stood it so long.

"The insane patience of these English wives," one or two of them said after she had gone.

"The insane selfishness of these English husbands," said some of the others.

"We haven't much to boast of," put in the woman lawyer. "We have the same insanity going on over here, the only difference being that the husbands have changed places with the wives."

Late into the night that dinner club in Greenwich Village discussed this subject. With the greatest good humor and vivacity no one agreed with any one else except on two points which had nothing to do with the main issue. These points were that Joan must be asked to come again, and that seven years of the Italian Renaissance bore a remarkable resemblance to the barn called "Never ending."

After this they "took her on." They themselves showed her things and people, and her wanderings were no longer lonely. She got a real glimpse into ordinary workaday American life such as few English visitors ever see; and she was brought into natural contact with that most splendid section of the American world — the professional and business men and women of moderate and even poor means — almost unknown to England, and yet representative of all that is the finest and best in American character. She had always heard that the Americans cared only for money, show and luxury, and that they outdid each other in vulgar display and pride of wealth, focussing entirely on the material side of life, with never the faintest leaning towards the spiritual.

But none of her Americans answered to that description. No, what she found was freedom, independence, dash, alertness, a large interpretation and a large chivalry.

They planted her in the middle of the Brooklyn Bridge, so that she might see the sky scrapers illuminated to their full intensity, and the myriads of lights of Manhattan stretching away far to the North, and the curious blue puffs of steam like little clouds flying low, standing out clear and definite in the wonderful opalescence of the atmosphere. They took her by night to the New Jersey shore, whence she beheld the great city arrayed in its magic garment of dazzling jewels of light. They wafted her up to the twenty-third story of one of the gigantic buildings, so that she might marvel at the stupendous view of New York laid at her feet, and experience the amazing silence of the heights, the sense of complete isolation and peace unbelievable.

They showed her Chinatown, its joss houses, its theater and those queer little shops with dried fish and pottery amicably intermingled. She saw under their guidance the Ghetto, the Bowery with its four tram lines and two elevated railways, and the Italian quarter. They introduced her to the fashionable quarter too, the swell houses, the swell hotels and Peacock Avenue at its moment of amusing but garish pride and perfection. They did not forget the magnificent Pennsylvania Railway Depot with its noble hall and amazingly effective decorations of maps painted on the lunettes under the dome; and when Joan said it reminded her of the moors, they laughed and took her there again, to gather heather, so they put it.

They presented her to the Stock Exchange where the colossal money transactions take place; but the importance of the atmosphere made no appeal to her. She was entirely thankful to escape to the Public Library; and having thus broken the ice of estrangement from books, she went meekly enough with Miss Emory, a librarian, to

attend a large conference of librarians held that year at Brooklyn. For everything meant a new experience to her; and books themselves were taking on a fresh meaning in the light of liberty which was gradually clearing her vision.

Her interest in this new life culminated in a visit which, under the wing of the probation officer attached to the Night Court, Miss Mildred T. Long, she paid to the Jefferson Market Police Court, where she saw the women in jail brought straight from the streets, some painted, well dressed, defiant, others shabbily clad, shrinking, weeping. She went to the room where the finger prints were taken, and afterwards sat in the Court for nearly four hours, following eagerly all that happened, listening to the depositions of the patrolmen, marking the varied demeanor of the women charged with "soliciting," weighing their answers, watching the magistrate with lynx eyes, and noting the wonderful work of her friend the woman probation officer, who seemed to her the one redeeming feature of the whole pitiful Tragedy. And brought thus face to face with this problem of the world, her thoughts flew instinctively to the raven-haired woman at home, in that England to which she had been giving scarcely a passing moment of memory.

"My God," she said to herself — and she almost said it aloud — "if it were the raven-haired woman standing there at the mercy of all these men, I should want to tear them all to pieces — the magistrate first, and then the patrolmen."

Her friends asked her the next day what her impression of the Night Court had been. Her face was white and tense, and her voice trembled as she said almost inaudibly:

"I think all the injustice of men towards women through all the ages can be epitomized in that scene. I *shall* never forget it."

After this Joan seemed to lose interest in sight-seeing. A severe blizzard put an end to her many wanderings, for only the Avenue and fine streets were cleared of snow, the side streets being mostly left untouched. So she had time on her hands, and began seriously to face her position.

She found that with all her care, her little store of money would soon be coming to an end. She had had a splendid spell of enjoyment and had been drifting on, living only in the passing moment, a real tramp on the highway, ready for the next set of events, whatever they might be. But now she would have to get some work. But what work? Anything but that Renaissance work — but what and how?

She could not bring herself to ask Miss Byrne. Her pride would not allow her. She had no idea, of course, that Miss Byrne knew anything about her concerns, except that she was not a Wall Street millionaire. She realized that Miss Byrne and her friends had been exceedingly kind, not only in showing her how to live, but also in helping her to simple pleasures and experiences which involved no spending either on her part or theirs. Her theater going, for instance, had amounted to a Sicilian Marionette show in an old schoolroom behind a tenement house in Second Avenue. They had let her pay for herself the mighty sum of twenty-five cents; and probably no one had ever enjoyed an outing more than Joan enjoyed that memorable evening when she treated herself to her first "Stall." So there had been no patronage, no encroachment on independence of purse and payment, but only a true chivalry of understanding reticence. And she would even have preferred to use old Keturah's money, and thus gain time to make inquiries about work, rather than trouble Miss Byrne or any one.

She began to look for employment. And she found none. She was not smart enough for this post, not

strong enough for that post. Perhaps she did not go to the right quarters; and as she took no one into her confidence, no one had the chance of helping and advising her, nor the means of knowing her disappointments. It dawned on her at last that she had been reckless in coming all this long way from England to be stranded amongst strangers; and she would have given a good deal for a line from Crazy Crank saying that she was to be ready on the morrow to start off and meet their united doom on the homeward voyage. The climax came when she was obliged to go to the National City Bank to claim what she believed to be Keturah's fifteen pounds savings cabled out by the raven-haired woman.

She paused outside the building which she had so often passed on her wanderings in Wall Street. She could not bring herself to take that money now it came to the point. If she had to take it, it meant that her journey had been a failure, her dash for freedom a fiasco, and her longings for independence a farce. No, she couldn't take it, she wouldn't take it—not even though it was kind old Keturah's money—the money of an old friend linking her with her own family life of the past. No, it was impossible. If she took it, her pride would be gone, her spirit crushed. She did not even give a thought to Horace's cabled remittances. They were beyond the range of consideration. To leave him and accept his money—that was obviously impossible. But in the case of Keturah, there would be some mitigation to the disgrace—some, but not much.

No, she must stand on her own legs. She shook her head, set her face and left the place, slowly, deliberately, without regret, with positive relief.

But what was she to do? The remembrance of that Renaissance work offered to her and rejected now flashed across her mind. Would she have to apply for it after

all? It was the last thing she wanted. It was the very thing she had fled from. And yet it seemed to be her only chance of earning an instant livelihood — though not an independent one, since it would be through knowledge learnt from Horace. That was the bitterest part of it. Nothing off her own bat. All of it by means of him. This was the thought which pervaded her, tortured her as she took the car to the premises of Messrs. R. W. Post in Fifth Avenue. She paced up and down outside. She wept silently, tearlessly, from rage, from thwarted rebellion, from dire disappointment. Twice she went away.

"I can't," she said. "It is impossible to me."

Twice she came back.

"I must," she said. "If I don't, I shall have to suffer a worse humiliation — taking old Keturah's savings. That would make me even more contemptible to myself."

Finally she braced herself and went to the inquiry office and asked to see Mr. Post. The clerk recognized her and sent her name in to the head of the firm. In a few minutes she was conducted to that room where she had said that "nothing ever happened."

Mr. Post was turning over the pages of a book when she came in; but he laid it aside at once, and a kindly smile passed over his face as he placed a chair for her. He noticed that she was pale and a little harassed. But she still looked the little plucky creature who had been his fellow-traveler; and although she had previously made him exceedingly angry because he had thought her ridiculous in her obstinacy and had been unable to fathom the feelings which prompted her stubbornness, yet he could not help being pleased to see her — stubbornness, pig-headedness and all.

"Well," he said, "and so you have ventured once more into these dangerous premises where such forbidding books as Renaissance histories are published. I have just

been glancing at our very latest — *Gardens of the Italian Renaissance*. Here it is. But I don't suppose you would like to see it."

The ghost of a smile flitted across her face. She did not speak, but she shot a glance at the volume lying on his desk, and nearly took it up.

"What can I do for you?" he asked kindly.

For a moment she sat silent, her eyes fixed on the ground. Then she looked up.

"I have come to say that if you still care to offer it, I think I can undertake that Renaissance work," she said slowly.

He never knew of course what it cost her to frame that sentence. He could not know that her request for this bit of work meant capitulation and mortification of spirit, and that she had sworn to herself that never, never would she capitulate. Never. And here she was capitulating entirely, not to him — that didn't matter — but to Horace — to that very bondage of brain from which she believed she had freed herself for ever. Once again she was going to be under his mental sway. Once again she was going to be a parrot, repeating the words he had taught her and the opinions he had instilled into her. There was no escape. She had let herself be captured again.

But all this conflict of the spirit, all this real tragedy of the soul was of necessity hidden from the publisher. He only saw before him a gifted but obstinate scholar who had refused an attractive offer of work from a leading firm. There was a dead silence between them, during which he debated with himself.

"Supposing I were to say that it's too late, that I have given the work elsewhere," he remarked at length, just a little stiffly.

To his surprise and secret amusement, her face immediately brightened. He might have been telling her

some welcome piece of news instead of heralding a possible disappointment.

"What would you say then?" he added.

Joan rose, almost sprang up, and gave a sigh of relief.

"I believe I would say that I was glad," she exclaimed.

"I would say that I had done what I knew I ought to and yet was free from something which — which would renew a bondage which was intolerable."

"Free, but stranded, I should imagine," he said half to himself. "Is that it?"

"Yes, I suppose that is it," she answered simply. There was another pause.

"Well, the work is still undone," he said. "You can still take it on if you like."

"Thank you," she said gravely. "I will do it to the best of my ability."

"Without reluctance?" he asked kindly, and yet purposefully.

"No, not without a sort of reluctance," she said, her lips contracting with a sudden attack of obstinacy. And then, as if ashamed of herself, she added earnestly:

"But with the utmost loyalty."

"That I am entirely sure of," he said. "And who knows, perhaps the reluctance will vanish in the presence of all your old friends, Savonarola, the Medici, the Borgias, the Sforzas, the D'Estes, the Baglioni and all that brilliant company of wonderful and wicked people."

"Not so wicked as all that," Joan said staunchly.

"Ah, you're going to defend them," he said. "Come, that's a good sign."

So in this fashion Joan settled down to work in New York City.

PART III

CHAPTER I

MEANTIME in England the days went by, and still Horace lingered on in Beaudesart's home. Beaudesart bore with his presence in an insanely patient manner; but the strain began to tell, and he showed signs of a listlessness and an irritability entirely foreign to his nature. He looked and felt ill. But, as he said to himself, he could not expect to be buoyed up with old Horace as his constant companion. His friends reasoned with him in vain, and were always trying to impress on him that no amount of old friendship could demand such a sacrifice, and that he was pushing his absurdness to a ridiculous and senseless degree. Mrs. Parflete was the only one who did not lecture him on the subject.

"It's a pity, of course, that Mr. Holbrook is still here," she said. "He'd be much better in his own home, and you'd be much better with your home to yourself. But being what you are, one couldn't expect you to act differently. It would be too bewildering to see you sensible."

Beaudesart smiled.

"I simply couldn't let him go back to that lonely barn house," he said. "He'd take to drugs again, or commit suicide there; and I should have killed him as surely as if I had stabbed him myself."

So Horace remained and spent most of his time huddled up near the fire. The result was that Beaudesart absented himself increasingly. He went to his old friend

Eridge, the portrait painter, and watched him at work. That comforted him a little. Eridge was ridiculously prosperous, it was true, but there was no denying that he was exceedingly clever; and the way he seized the psychology of the sitter and expressed it in the picture, was both amazing and interesting. At other times Beaudesart put in an hour or two at the newspaper shop and took charge when Mrs. Parflete wanted an afternoon to herself.

But his principal occupation was walking. He walked for miles, and came back to his desolate studio, worn out and footsore. He never returned with any sense of relief or anticipation of pleasure as in the old days. His home life was ruined. The cheery atmosphere which people of all nondescript sorts had prized with equal value, had ceased to exist, and his intimates left off coming. Formerly it had always been an adventure to visit him. Anything might happen or nothing. Any one might arrive, from jail or from Jericho. And indeed Bingham, the clarionet player, was expected from Portland any time. But now it was useless to call. Beaudesart was scarcely ever in the studio, and the people in possession were Horace Holbrook who was one "limit," and the expert in criminology who was another "limit."

No change of atmosphere nor absence of it made the slightest difference to Henry Hereford. He came as usual whenever he had leisure and worked at his landscapes with the same unremitting industry. With his mind focused on gentians, fields of clover or primrose woods, a hundred depressing Holbrooks might have been present in the studio, provided they did not interfere with him. And Beaudesart's frequent absences did not cause him any real inconvenience, since he had the knack of turning up at the exact moment when his pupil needed guidance. Thus Hereford's life in the studio flowed on calmly, without so much as a ripple of disturbance. But

his comfort and ease were on the eve of being threatened in a manner entirely unforeseen. One day Mrs. Parflete arrived on the scene unexpectedly and walked right up to the sacred easel.

"Mr. Hereford," she said, "I want to speak to you. Can you spare me a few moments?"

Hereford was at that moment touching in the eye of a primrose, and nothing existed for him except that eye.

She spoke again, and he looked away from his work with a bored and annoyed expression.

"Well," he said gruffly, "what is it? I'm busy."

She stepped across to the bedroom, the door of which stood open, made sure that it was empty and that she and her enemy were quite alone, and then returned to the easel.

"I'm anxious about Mr. Beaudesart," she said. "I've had a feeling for some time that there's some mischief brewing for him. To-day when Mr. Holbrook called at the shop to buy some tobacco and found Mr. Beaudesart there, the look of hate on his face was something awful. I can't forget it. And then it changed to a sort of sly amusement. I can't forget that either. It made me shudder."

Henry Hereford frowned.

"Nonsense," he said crossly. "Please reserve that kind of narration for the Courts, where it has its use."

"Wouldn't it be better to prevent this particular bit of narration from getting to the Courts?" she said. "But of course if you don't care about Mr. Beaudesart's welfare, you don't. So that's the end of our talk."

He put down his palette.

"It isn't the end of our talk," he said. "It's the beginning. And I do care for Beaudesart, and you know it. Should I come and paint landscapes here, if I didn't care?"

"Perhaps the light is good," Mrs. Parflete suggested spitefully.

He looked at her with his little gimlet eyes which had pierced so many victims, but which had never been able to make the slightest effect on her.

"Let us be friends," he said after a pause. "It is the habit of Englishmen to try and snuff out initiative in women. I admit, a hateful habit. I make a handsome apology. And I would like to add that although the light is good here, there is something better still—the sunniness, the warmth of Beaudesart's nature. Try and dislike me less. You do dislike me thoroughly, don't you?"

"Yes," she said honestly, "I do, Mr. Hereford."

But she smiled a little as she spoke, and he smiled too. It was the beginning of a rapprochement.

"What I wanted to say was just this," she went on. "Mr. Beaudesart won't turn Mr. Holbrook away, because he thinks that if he abandons him, he will injure him. That's Mr. Beaudesart all over, isn't it? But if you could make him see that he's injuring him still more by letting him stay, I daresay then he'd be willing to send him off."

"But how is Beaudesart injuring Holbrook in letting him stay?" asked Henry Hereford.

"Well, don't you call it injuring a person when you let that person feed and feed his hatred of you until—until the very sight of you makes him look like the fiend Mr. Holbrook looked to-day?" she said. "I call that injuring a person if you don't."

Henry Hereford stood lost in thought.

"Perhaps there is something in what you say," he remarked half to himself.

"Next time you see them together, watch Mr. Holbrook," she said. "Then you'll understand what I mean."

She continued after a pause:

"I don't think Mr. Beaudesart is safe. I'm very anxious about his safety. I wasn't at first. I was only sorry he was unhappy. But now I'm worried because he is unsafe."

"Woman's nonsense," the barrister said with some impatience.

"Woman's instinct," she retorted sharply.

He folded his arms behind him and began walking up and down. Not a word did he speak. Mrs. Parflete watched him for a few minutes and then strolled towards the door.

"Well, at any rate, I've made the selfish old brute think of something besides his primroses and clover fields," she said to herself.

She was opening the door, when he said:

"Don't go. I admit that woman's instinct is not a negligible quantity, and that in any case it would be as well to examine into the situation as presented by you. I shall do so. That I have not already done so, is accounted for by the simple fact that in private life one has other interests and other claims on one's powers of concentration."

He turned longingly to his easel, and nearly went back to it.

"But I shall now examine into the situation," he repeated, "thoroughly and completely. You can rest assured about that."

She nodded approvingly.

"The root of all the trouble is Mrs. Holbrook, of course," he said.

"Well, that is the way you would put it, I suppose," she answered. "But it isn't her fault. She has done nothing. It wasn't her fault that Mr. Beaudesart made all those sketches and pictures of her. That first started the jealousy."

"You call it nothing then to abandon her husband and her home and run off to America?" he asked severely.

"I call it nothing to what she might have done, Mr. Hereford," Mrs. Parflete replied staunchly. "Mr. Holbrook's suspicions and jealousies are simply madness. That's what they are."

"You would appear to be holding a brief for this young runaway wife," he said, trying to fix her with his eyes, and failing as usual.

"I think she had to free herself," Mrs. Parflete answered. "The wonder is she didn't do it before."

"Freedom for herself and injury to others," he said sententiously. "The modern woman's doctrine, I suppose."

Mrs. Parflete laughed.

"Don't be ridiculous, Mr. Hereford," she said good-temperedly. "Freedom has got to have its victims. It always has had. No one has minded as long as the victims have been females."

He glared at her again without in the least annoying her, and made one more attempt to score a point:

"And you yourself owe this young woman no resentment for having come and upset things in this atmosphere — spoilt your little bit of companionship with Beaudesart, or at any rate impaired it?"

"Well, of course I wasn't pleased at first," she said frankly. "Who would be? Mr. Beaudesart has never been the same since he paid that visit to Mr. Holbrook's home. He can't get her out of his head and he never will. But that's no fault of his, and none of hers either. I've nothing against her. I had at first, of course. But not now. No one's just without a struggle. Well, I struggled. That's all."

Her simplicity, her frankness, her directness made a profound impression on him; and he capitulated to her then and there. It was true that he realized finally that

she could never be bullied. But he also realized that there was some one with an outlook fine, generous and human, and that he had been in contact with her for six or seven years without giving himself the chance of appreciating her.

"Mrs. Parflete," he said, "I may not be able to keep to my resolution, human nature being weak and human habits strong. But as an ally—and a proud one—I shall try to modify my—shall we call it hatefulness? And now I must touch in those few primroses before this good light, which you say I'm so fond of, fades completely. As for the state of things which you've given me a hint of, be sure I'll look into it at once, without delay. Between us, then, Beaudesart will be watched over and—if you like to have it so expressed—his safety secured."

Mrs. Parflete went away with a sigh of relief, well pleased with the result of her interview, and inwardly amused by the thought of the alliance between herself and her old enemy.

She knew well that she had enlisted powerful aid on behalf of Beaudesart, and that Mr. Henry Hereford would turn on the situation all the light of his professional intelligence and experience.

CHAPTER II

THE enemy, now an ally, kept his word and began to examine into the situation. But not without something of an effort. Beaudesart's studio had ever been a haven of rest to him, where his professional life fell off him as a garment, and the artist's ambition possessed him heart and soul. But now instead of being free to devote himself entirely to his painting, he had to take mental observations which were by no means in harmony with clover fields, reeds in the river and primroses in the woods. It was all very annoying; and there were times when he regretted the alliance and wished heartily that he could have administered Mrs. Parflete a good Court bullying for disturbing his peaceful enjoyment and restful industry. And to what purpose, pray? None that he could see. Holbrook was a morose sort of a cur. That was obvious enough. But there was no harm in him. As to that celebrated look of hatred on his face, full of danger, indicative of mischief brewing, well, all he could say was that he had not observed it. It was probably the outcome of that woman's absurd imagination.

But one day Henry Hereford had to change his opinions. Beaudesart came home earlier than usual, and Hereford happened to glance, not by design but by pure chance, at the corner where Horace usually sat. He saw for himself on Holbrook's face an expression of diabolical hatred. It positively made him shudder.

"The woman was right," he said to himself.

After this his interest became aroused, and he determined to try and learn something of what was going on

in Holbrook's mind. That part of his brain which was deeply interested in the problems of psychology, asserted itself imperiously against that other part which reveled in the sweet things of a peaceful landscape. A fight went on between these two segments, and for a while the primroses perished in the woods. At least they looked as if they had perished; and Henry Hereford shook his head one afternoon as he recognized the imperfection of his achievement and murmured:

"Disturbing influences. Nothing but that. I can do better than that. Disturbing influences. Perhaps being once alone in the studio, I may be able to revive these drooping flowers."

He set to work, was having a certain amount of success, and forgetful of all psychological problems, was entirely absorbed in the task he loved so well, when the bedroom door opened and Horace, in his furtive fashion, stole into the room. He nodded to Hereford and received in exchange the customary automatic response. These two sole surviving occupants of the studio were so used to each other that up to this moment they had taken very little notice of each other's absence or presence. But to-day a new order of things set in. Hereford tried after Horace's arrival to go on with his painting. He could not. The spell of interest, of industry was broken. Something else claimed him. He did not at once put down palette and brush. He appeared for fully half an hour to be as absorbed, as busy as ever. But at last he abandoned his easel and sat down by the fire.

"Curious," he said, "I don't seem to get on with those primroses this afternoon. I have stuck hopelessly. I suppose I want some help from Beaudesart. Or perhaps it is that I'm really developing into the artist and have my moods. I have never before believed in moods. But it would seem they exist, after all."

Horace looked up rather irritably. He resented that

Hereford should have left the boundaries of the easel and broken in upon the preserves of the fireside. He fidgeted a little and fingered his book with added nervousness. He was never without a book of some sort bearing on the Italian Renaissance, which however he scarcely ever read. Hereford took no notice of his irritation and restlessness and went on talking:

"I have spent my life in being impatient with the artistic temperament. I have never understood it. And now it looks as if I were going to have threatenings of it myself. Very strange and amusing, isn't it? I had a brother who was rather like Beaudesart. Never could do things when we wanted him to. Said always, 'that wasn't the hour.' I called it laziness—bone laziness. We all called it that in our family. We were all diligent people—every one of us, except David. Every minute of our time filled up, you know. But now I see that he was the gifted one—and we were the hacks. We tried to influence him. But we never made the slightest impression on him. He couldn't be influenced."

Horace looked up again.

"People can't be influenced," he said. "You may think you've influenced them, but you haven't. You may put all the weight of your personality into the job, all the force of your mind. And in the end you'll find you have failed. You only make a surface impression. You couldn't touch the rocks, the foundation."

Hereford made no comment. He had achieved his object, accounted for his sudden and unwonted attack of laziness and listlessness, and got into definite conversation with the man whom he wished to study. They had quite a long discussion on the subject of influence, good and evil; and Horace, who had a fine brain, and a very definite charm of manner too when he chose to exert it, made a favorable impression on Hereford, both for sanity of outlook and general harmlessness. But at last Hor-

ace collapsed, became restless and fidgety, and cast at the abandoned easel glances which plainly intimated that Hereford's right place was there and nowhere else.

Hereford, who was having a secret little laugh over Horace's obvious eagerness to get rid of him, rose and said:

"Well, I'll have another try at those primroses and see whether this is the hour. I mustn't give in to moods without something of a struggle."

Apparently it was not the hour, for after he had put in a few more touches to his picture and contemplated it now near, now far, he shook his head and went away. But his gimlet eyes had noticed that Horace, who was staring at something fixedly, made a sudden slight movement forward with an impulse of alertness immediately checked. For a moment the expert in criminology, lost in thought, paused at the studio gate. It was the checking of the movement which had aroused his curiosity.

He missed the next day; but the following afternoon he was once more at his easel and remained in the exact geographical position tacitly assigned to him, without attempting to invade outside territory. Horace crouched by the fireside as usual. Suddenly the sound of a clarinet was heard outside. This was the music — the opening bars of Schumann's Third Romance arranged for clarinet: —



Horace sprung up. All the surly sulkiness on his face had disappeared. It was lit up by real kindness.

"That's Bingham," he said. "Beaudesart said something about his being due out of prison in a week or two."

He ran to the door and opened it. Hereford winced. He never liked coming face to face with this particular class of Beaudesart's friends. On more than one occasion he had met with a warm reception from them; and his natural impulse now was to beat a hasty retreat. Courage was not one of his characteristics; and he really did glance longingly at the studio side door. It said something for him that he subdued his fear and for the sake of pursuing his investigations, remained at his post, at his easel, rather an heroic figure if any one could have known it.

Bingham meantime was made welcome by Holbrook in a most kindly fashion. In the absence of Beaudesart, Joan's queer husband did the honors to the clarionet player with a curious and considerate charm of manner which would have explained the hold he could have on any one if he wished. It certainly explained to Hereford Beaudesart's patient endurance of him; and if he had been interested in Joan, it would have helped him to understand how she had been able to be caged up with him and the Renaissance for seven whole years. Selfless, cheery and quietly busy, Holbrook moved about preparing tea, unearthing jam and biscuits and singing the praises of the electric stove as he made the toast; and the gimlet eyes noticed every single detail of the man's transformation into a normal human being, and noticed too the happiness, gratitude and relief written large on the discharged prisoner's face.

"Freedom," Bingham said, leaning back in the arm-chair and stretching out his legs. "Freedom—freedom—freedom. And a haven where you needn't be ashamed of yourself for what you've done. Beaudesart never was ashamed of me. Always there has been that sustaining thought at the back of my brain. And where's the cat,

by the way? Where's Maria? She never used to be out at this hour. Nor did Beaudesart. I suppose they'll be in soon."

Horace nodded. There was no sign of ill-will on his countenance at the mention of Beaudesart.

"It was a year this time," Bingham continued. "Same thing, of course—lifting jewels. And you know, the queer part is I'd sell my soul not to do it. But what they call crime is a queer thing. Those asses of men who sit in judgment on you and don't leave you a single rag of good intention—by Gosh, how little they know."

"There's one of them here," Horace said, pointing to Hereford, who again wished that his discretion had outrun his valor, and that he had made for that side door.

But Bingham only smiled. There was evidently no bitterness in his heart.

"Oh, I know about Hereford," he said. "He's allowed to come here for the good of his soul. And he couldn't come to a better place. I wouldn't be the one to hound him away. Beaudesart's home is a haven for us all."

Horace made no reply, and for a moment silence reigned in the studio.

"Well, well," Bingham said, "old Beaudesart isn't here, but I must play my first tune of freedom as usual, and keep up the tradition of renewed liberty."

He took his instrument, which he had laid aside on the sofa, looked it up and down, caressed it, and then after testing it, began:—



Music both plaintive and courageous: charged with regret and renewal: and the deep, rich tones of the clarionet interpreting it as the voice of no other instrument could ever succeed in doing. And the man's spirit, that in him which was the truest, highest and best, borne along on the waves of sound, whispering its message — who knows where?

Hereford, who loved music, paused in his work. He stood perfectly still, with closed eyes. Horace stared into the fire. His hands, usually so restless, moved not a muscle.

Suddenly Bingham broke off.

"Oh," he exclaimed, "it's not the same without old Beaudesart. I must go and find him. Why isn't he here? There's something wrong with the place. Something wrong with the atmosphere."

"Something wrong with the place," Horace repeated mechanically.

"Yes, yes," Bingham said, shaking his head in distress. And the next minute he had gone.

"Something wrong with the place," Horace said again, but this time with painful intensity. "And it's I who have caused it. I who have caused it."

He beat his breast. He covered his face with his hands. Hereford did not look up, did not stir from his easel, did not ask a single question, did not appear to take the slightest interest in the situation. But when he was leaving the studio, he again noticed that Horace made a slight movement forward with that same impulse of alertness immediately checked.

Bingham did not return, and no other visitors presented themselves in the course of the following days. But Hereford came as usual in his spare time and occasionally exchanged remarks with Horace when his newly discovered artistic temperament demanded relaxation by

the fireside. During those brief spells the gimlet eyes tried to detect what it was that Horace always stared at when he became fidgety and began to show signs of desiring ardently the immediate departure of his companion. He always looked in the same direction and always rose in that direction directly he knew that he was going to be freed from another person's presence.

Hereford was greatly puzzled by this detail. When he was alone one afternoon he sat in Horace's chair, and did the staring himself. He learnt nothing. There was nothing to guide him. He could only conclude that the electric stove, which was placed in position just there, and for which Horace had always shown a particular liking, fascinated the peculiar fellow to such an extent that he could not take his gaze off it. This was not an explanation which satisfied Hereford; but he could find no other. And he had to leave it at that and be content that he had not failed in perhaps more important directions, and had found many opportunities to study Horace's character and present state of mind.

But one afternoon something rather curious happened. Horace did not come into the studio at his usual hour. Beaudesart, on the contrary, and in contradiction to his new habits, arrived home early, and began to make some Bengers' food for himself in a little blue enameled saucepan. He often took Bengers when he was tired, and laughingly said it saved two kinds of trouble, domesticity and digestion. He was in the act of sipping it in spoonfuls, when Horace crept in, saw what Beaudesart was doing and became suddenly seized by some sort of fury which transformed his features into those of a malignant fiend. He looked like a demon thwarted of his victim, like a wild beast whose prey had escaped him. His very frame trembled from the effort he made to control himself. The paroxysm was momentary only, and not ob-

served by old unsuspecting Beaudesart, who was in a cheerier mood than he had been for a long while, and was teasing Maria to give her paw. But the gimlet eyes had seen this exhibition of intense malice; and the owner of them decided instantly that he had learnt enough to justify him in warning Beaudesart that the friend whom he was harboring, was a dangerous companion.

"The woman was right," the barrister said.

The next day he went on painting long after his usual hour; and when he could not see, still lingered, conscious of Horace's increasing irritability at his continued presence, but stubbornly determined not to budge from that studio until Beaudesart arrived home.

He had one or two rather important engagements for that evening; but he let everything slip, and remained at his post, dogged, impassive, harmless, dreamy, simulating an attack of the artistic temperament which could not tear itself away from an atmosphere where ideas were born and ability grew.

A psychic fight between the two men took place. Horace sent out a cohort of fierce wishes to annihilate the invader. Hereford despatched in opposition a battalion of cold-blooded professional persistences against which there could be no advance. And at last Horace, surly and restless beyond endurance, snatched up his hat and went out. Hereford did not move. For two solid hours he did not move. Then Beaudesart came and found him.

"You here, Eminent Counsel," he said, with a distinct smile of pleasure. "Rather a relief, you know, not to find my usual gay companion at home. Do you also think of coming to live here? It's very remarkable the way people like my studio. I think I'd better clear off altogether."

"Yes, I think it would be better," Hereford said gravely. "You want a change."

"I want something," Beaudesart said. "I don't know what."

"You may want a hundred things for all I know," Hereford said. "But amongst them you want freedom from Holbrook. Any one would."

"I admit he's a devil of a trial," Beaudesart said. "But I can't and won't turn him out. He hasn't any one in the world but me, now that his wife has left him. If I were to forsake him, what would become of him?"

"The question in my mind is what is going to become of him if you don't forsake him," Hereford said slowly. "That's why I've waited so long to see you to-night. I intended to see you if I'd had to wait here till the morning."

Beaudesart made no comment, but the expression on his face showed plainly that he too was going to put up a fight of obstinacy.

"I'm not taking you into consideration at all," Hereford went on. "After all, it is your own affair if you deliberately choose to have your everyday life ruined, your habits broken up and your painting interrupted. Probably you don't care that your new sunset which you thought so much of, stands unfinished, and that your remarkable searchlight picture, which I believe is the best thing you've ever done, is thrown aside, with its face to the wall."

"Ah," Beaudesart said, with a sudden sunny smile. "My old searchlight picture to be sure! I must dig him out some day. By Jove, I will now!"

He sprang up and seized it from the corner where he had placed it, and began studying it. Eminent Counsel showed no signs of irritation. He waited, with pig-headed patience.

"I beg your pardon," Beaudesart said, putting it down at last. "It's your fault for mentioning it. And you're right too. I oughtn't to neglect it. Well, go on if you

want to say anything more. Let's get it all done. I'm listening."

"This much I wanted to say," Hereford continued. "Your everyday life — its happiness — its safety — yes, I use that word deliberately — concerns you chiefly. But there is another aspect which you have no right to ignore. Has it struck you that in allowing Holbrook to remain on here you are doing him a deep, an irreparable injury?"

"Look here, Hereford," Beaudesart said, losing his temper, "you may be damned clever in the Courts, but you've damned little sense outside them. Every one knows that. Injury indeed. I suppose you call it an injury to try and keep him from drugging himself to death. That's what he'll do if he's left alone."

"That's not the worst thing he could do for himself," Hereford said quietly, "nor the worst thing that you could let him do. I tell you solemnly that I believe you're injuring him grievously, not giving him a chance, encouraging him, goading him on, tempting him —"

"Tempting him to what?" Beaudesart asked fiercely. "Why don't you speak up like a man and say what you mean?"

"I mean that I have watched him very closely these last days," Hereford said with unruffled calm. "I have seen at times when you were present, an evil look on his face which is a danger signal. I repeat my words, a danger signal. I have observed him in many of his moods, seen for myself his kindness, felt his charm, but also have been conscious of his strange intentness on some secret purpose, and have witnessed an amazing outbreak of what seemed to me passionate remorse. Something dark is going on here. I have not yet found all the threads. But I shall find them. And meantime I tell you his presence here is a menace to yourself and to him. The clarionet player was right. He said there was some-

thing wrong with the place. And that explains why he has not returned to his haven. And Holbrook knew. In his agony of mind he beat his breast. But last night when he came in and found you taking your simple meal there was no beating of the breast, Beaudesart. There was — well, I can't speak of it. I have seen much that is awful in my time. It takes a good deal to make me, an old stager, shudder. But I shuddered."

"By Heaven, and you will again if I have anything to do with it," Beaudesart exclaimed, springing up in angry excitement. "Been watching him closely, have you? Spying on him, have you? Hunting down his thoughts, his intentions, his moods, have you? No wonder Bingham said there was something wrong with the place. You're the cause of it, and not poor old Holbrook. Out you go, I say, I'll have no mean spying going on here. No more threads are you going to find here, I can tell you. This is my place, not yours — I shall do what I like in my place. I'd rather have 'my safety,' as you call it, risked a thousand times over, than endure a single minute of your beastly bloodhound work. So take your picture and all your belongings, and be off this moment. And as for safety, I should only believe I was risking it if Horace himself told me so. And even then I mightn't believe it. So now go."

Henry Hereford took his primrose wood and escaped gladly.

CHAPTER III

BEAUDESART heaved a sigh of relief when he was left alone. He was so irritated at being rallied about Horace, that he could have kicked his friend Hereford out of the premises and have rejoiced in the performance. Lord in Heaven, how sick and tired he was of everything. Everywhere he went some one started bullying him about old Horace. Even Mrs. Parflete in the newspaper shop, Eridge in his studio, and Hereford, here, in his own home, or what used to be his home. And Bingham, silently, by staying away. It was insufferable, and by Jove, he wasn't going to stand it any longer. Altogether they were far more of a nuisance than old Horace himself.

Safety — what rot. Danger signal — bosh. A menace — piffle. As if he didn't know through and through the sort of fellow he had to deal with — queer and impossible and resentful and all that — oh yes, and made worse by an occasional dose of those infernal drugs — but there you had the whole thing in a nutshell. And for these fools of outsiders to come and exhort him to change his attitude towards his old pal — no, indeed, it wasn't to be borne. Of course he had made an idiotic mistake in going to see Horace again. Why did he go? Well, what can you do when some inner voice says you've got to do this, you've got to do it, you've got to do it? He felt he had to go. If he had not gone, he would not have been dragged into these confounded complications, he would not have met Joan Holbrook, wouldn't have been haunted by her, she wouldn't have come to him, she wouldn't have seen his pictures — ah, she had liked that

searchlight picture, hadn't she? He heard her voice saying: "A searchlight — and it's moving — I see it moving. How thrilling!" And he saw her little figure darting about from one picture to another.

He laughed joyously. There was pain of course in the memory of her because he couldn't have her — because she wasn't his — his only — and oh, how he wanted her — wanted her, not only for her womanhood, but for comradeship, good fellowship and for that breath of fresh air, of which that friend of hers had spoken with relief and gratitude. Well, well, there was fresh air even in the thought of her, and happiness and light-heartedness and buoyancy of spirit too.

Where was she now? What was she doing with her freedom? Was she frightfully, frightfully delighted with her dash for liberty? What did she look like now, this moment? Not different at all perhaps. But exactly as he had seen her, free, joyous, detached, on the wing.

With sudden impulse he seized his crayons. There was a radiant smile on his face as, with that amazing cleverness for swift portraiture, he dashed off a picture of Joan and then another and then another. He had made up his mind never to do this again, and yet here he was at it with added zest and joyfulness, regardless of all consequences to himself and others.

But when suddenly he found Horace standing staring at his fifth picture of little Joan, he came to his senses and knew he had been a fool and a knave, too, to arouse the sleeping devil in his friend's heart. He braced himself to meet the oncoming storm.

But it did not come, at least not in the way of anger. It came in a frenzy of grief, bereftness, longing, tenderness and regret. Horace stretched out his arms to the picture.

"My little one, my little one," he cried, "how like you — it might be your very own self — would that it

were — would that I had not driven you away by my insane selfishness — would that I could get you back and that we could have some more of that old happiness together. You were happy sometimes, weren't you? I wasn't altogether a brute to you, was I? Indeed if you would only believe it, I wasn't always, always planning to mold your mind — no one could keep at it the whole time — not even a selfish, callous devil like myself — there were long, long intervals when I never thought of it, but only rejoiced in having you, and knew myself unworthy of your fresh young spirit."

He took the picture, clasped it to his heart and was caught in an agony of silent, tearless sorrow.

Beaudesart had moved away to the fireside and stood with bowed head. He felt that he had no right to be a witness of his friend's passionate grief, and yet no right to shirk the anger, the condemnation which might be awaiting him. Anger would come, he was sure, when the first intensity of misery had worn itself out; and he knew he had earned it. So he held himself in readiness to face it. But again the unexpected happened. Horace gathered himself together, put the picture back on the easel, glanced at the other four sketches strewn on the ground, and then stepped up to Beaudesart.

"Will," he said, in a voice which had no tone of menace in it, "I've been a fool about you and those pictures of my Joan. I know now that she never gave you any sittings. I think I've always known, but the devil of jealousy swoops down on me — I can't subdue him always — and you yourself tempt me, old fellow — you can't say you don't tempt me."

"No, I can't say it and I don't," Beaudesart answered. "I'm bitterly sorry. But you'll never know how I've tried to get her out of my mind. Twice I've seen her — twice only. The first time at your place. The second time when she came here for those few minutes. And it

was not for me personally that she came then. I realize that well enough. She came because I chanced to be the only representative to her of the outside world into which she longed to penetrate. That's all. Any one would have done instead of me. By ill luck it chanced to be me. Ill luck for me to have the misery of the whole thing, but not in the long run ill luck for you. If she ever ceases to care for you — and I don't believe she will — it won't be a middle-aged fellow like myself that she'll find, or be found by. It will be some one young and dashing, some modern young fellow who'll speak and understand her language, because it is his own. Well, supposing he had been standing in my shoes. That's where your luck comes in, old man."

Horace made no comment on Beaudesart's words, but went on as if there had been no interruption.

"I can scarcely tell you what I've been going through these days, these weeks," he said. "I don't suppose I knew myself until Bingham came and said he couldn't go on playing, couldn't remain here, and had to dash off instantly because there was something wrong with the place. And with a flash of light, with a horror of realization, I saw it was I who was poisoning the atmosphere — yes, I — with all sorts of plottings and schemings — plans of murder — yes, there you have it at last — murder. Half the time, nearly all the time I plan murder, I repent, I plan it again, I begin to carry it out, I repent in time, I am torn, I begin again — I am — glad I can begin again — that's the awful part — I'm glad when my phases of repentance are over — and yet thankful when they come back — thankful now, Will. But it won't last. Twice already I've nearly —"

He broke off with a gesture of entire helplessness and despair; and Beaudesart came to his rescue.

"Look here, Horace," he said gently, "we must part. It's as clear as crystal that it's bad for us to be together.

I tempt you beyond all bearing. By my very presence I evidently encourage in you all these hostile feelings. I hated to let you go back to your own home, to unlimited loneliness and perhaps unlimited drugging too; but that fox Hereford is right, after all. They've all said the same thing in a different way; but he summed it up when he said I was doing you a wrong in letting you remain here. He has smelt out something. He suspects you're after something. He warned me to look after what he called my safety. I told him I'd never believe my safety was in peril unless I heard it from you. And even then I didn't suppose I'd believe it. I turned him out of the studio, neck and crop. It was the only thing to do. For if you *are* up to anything, he'll hunt you down or lay a trap for you or find all the threads to make his case complete. So I've kicked him out, him and his primrose woods. No one is going to play the spy here. I'd rather be murdered than that any one should play the spy here. I told him so, the confounded old hangman. Out he went. And, by Heaven, he doesn't come here again to mount guard and see what's going on in my home. I've made that quite clear. But it's better for you now that you should go. Safer for you. As for myself, I'd take my risks, I'd trust you, and I want you to know it. And I say it again, I'd take my risks. I don't know what you've been doing. I don't want to know. But if, as you say, it's murder you've been planning in your evil moments, in the moments when you've not been quite my loyal damned disagreeable old pal of the past, well, don't we all murder each other in some way or other, murder the best in each other? That's how I look at it—slow murder too. Don't fret about it, old chap. Here's my hand if you'll take it."

His generosity, his kindness, his trustfulness moved Horace to his depth; but he did not grasp the hand held out to him. He shook his head regretfully as if he were

renouncing some precious and proffered gift which he fain would have accepted.

"I'll go to-morrow," he said in a low voice. "I know you'd give me another chance. But I'm not to be trusted. I can't answer for myself. To-night—well, you've stirred all the best in me, and I'm face to face with horror at myself. But what about to-morrow? What shall I be feeling and doing to-morrow? I—"

He stopped. The voice of the clarionet was heard outside:—



"Bingham," cried Beaudesart, and he flew to the door.

"Beaudesart," the clarionet player said, his wan face lighting up with pleasure. "I had to come back, although there's something wrong with the place. But everywhere else, every one is ashamed of me except you. You'd never be ashamed of a fellow, no matter what he'd done, would you?"

Horace looked up.

"Ah, you're right," he said. "It might be any kind of evil intent or action—any kind—treachery, robbery, murder—anything—and we'd still be able to breathe here—you—and I and every one."

"Nonsense," Beaudesart said. "And what about myself? Where do I come in with all my unresisted temptations and provocations?"

Bingham glanced from one man to another, and knew instantly that he had broken in on some tragic situation, at some crisis, secret, sacred, spiritual.

But he did not go. He could not go. This was his haven ; and he could not relinquish it again. Instead, he raised his clarionet to his lips, and poured out the very soul of him in the richest and mellowest tones ever heard in the voice of any clarionet. In and out of that impassioned improvisation ran the haunting, plaintive, courageous melody which had heralded his return.

CHAPTER IV

THE next day Horace left the studio for good and went to find some old lodgings near the British Museum where in the past he had lived many years. He had met himself face to face, and was horrified, appalled now that he realized the awfulness of his state of mind.

Twice, three times he had nearly brought himself to poison Beaudesart's food, not without struggle, not without intense stress and strain of spirit; still he had arrived at the point when familiarity with the idea itself was making the fulfilment of it increasingly easy and possible. And on that particular evening when Beaudesart arrived home unusually early and forestalled him, he could most certainly have carried out his intentions.

He remembered now with a shudder the frightful secret paroxysm of rage which had seized him when he found himself thwarted at the very moment of conquered reluctance. He shuddered still more at the ghastly thought that he could not trust himself, and that he was by no means yet free from the tyranny of that fixed idea which he abhorred. Even the previous night when Beaudesart and Bingham were sound asleep, he had stolen into the studio and stared and stared at the cupboard where Beaudesart kept his milk foods, and wondered whether his chance had come again and whether he could take it. No, he could not take it. But, good God, what about the mind which had fostered and would probably continue to foster this terrible temptation? What would little Joan think of him if she ever knew? She must never know. That must be kept from her as something too awful for

her to be allowed to learn. Hadn't she always said that he wouldn't hurt a spider — not even a tarantula spider? He remembered the occasion when she had first seen that word, looked it out in the dictionary, and used it in triumph the very next day to praise him, to express her utter belief in his kindness.

What would she say now? But it was her fault, wasn't it? After all, it was her fault. If she had not turned on him and abandoned him, the devil in him would have had no chance. A wave of anger swept over him, of indignation and wounded pride. He was creeping along Great Portland Street at the time, and he leaned against a shop window as if to withstand the oncoming rush of emotions. When he had recovered himself, he passed on slowly, feebly, but paused again outside a bird shop. There were caged cats, dogs, puppies, rabbits and birds of all kinds displayed for sale. A gray parrot in a cage hung up in the doorway was talking continuously. She said:

"Good morning, Nell. Sausages again for breakfast, damn it. Splendid book, Thomas Hardy forever, that's my opinion, devil take my eyes. Good morning, Nell, pretty Nell. Cecil Rhodes great man. Sausages again for breakfast, damn it. Splendid book, Thomas Hardy forever. Ha, ha, aren't you clever, Nell, pretty Nell, pretty poll, pretty poll, learn all I tell you, learn everything —"

The man of the shop, who himself looked like a bird, a hawk with a hungry eye, came out to see whether he had secured a customer for Nell. She had been ill lately, and this was the first time for several weeks that he had hung her cage out.

"A wonderful bird, sir," he said. "Ain't she got a marveelious heloquence? An orator, that's what she is, that bird, 'Yde Park's her natural 'ome. She'll learn any-

thing she's taught, sir, from sausages to Sanskrete."

("Sausages to Sanskrete," cried the gray parrot.)

"A wonderful bird, sir," repeated the man. "And she don't forget what she has learnt, like some of us. Never saw such a memory all the years I've been in this business."

Horace said nothing; but as he did not move off and as his demeanor did not seem altogether unpromising for business prospects, the man continued to talk about the qualities and characteristics of the parrot.

"And she has a heart too, she has," he said. "She feels things. I can vouch for that. There was some little spitfire of a woman that came along a few weeks ago, and stood where you stand listening to Nell, perhaps for a quarter of an hour or more. Then she went off. But back she came, and hung around for another good ten minutes. Now did she want to buy the bird? Not she. When I asked her, she got into a fair rage, stamped her foot almost and said: '*Buy her. Kill her, that's what I want to do.*' I couldn't get her or her words out of my head. I've said them so often that Nell's learnt them herself: '*Buy her. Kill her, that's what I want to do.*'"

("Buy her. Kill her, that's what I want to do," cried the gray parrot, her little eyes rolling round.)

"There, you heard her yourself," the bird fancier said. "Well, after that she took ill. Sort of fretted. Yes, she feels things, and I don't wonder. I never saw such a tigress in my life. I should know her anywhere. Fierce indeed. I never saw such fierceness in any animal or bird of my acquaintance, caged or uncaged. And what had the poor parrot done to her, I should like to know?"

The man's indignation had quite got the better of his commercial instincts. It was obvious that at this

particular moment he didn't care a hang whether or not he ever again sold bird or beast—dormouse or dromedary.

But suddenly a light broke in on a dark corner of Horace's brain. The parrot—the parrot. He saw Joan throw down the notebook and dash from the room, and he heard her cry: "The parrot—the parrot." He had never understood what she had meant. But now he understood. She had passed this shop on her way to the oculist, and here it was she had realized that she too was a parrot, able to learn all he told her, learn anything. He did not ask the bird fancier to describe that woman to him. He did not make a single enquiry about her. *He knew it was she.* A chance passing that way, a chance revelation—and all his work undone of which he had been so mightily proud. Proud. Was there after all anything to be proud of in taking a human being and making it into a parrot?

For him also a chance passing that way and a dim revelation. It was the beginning of a new knowledge.

CHAPTER V.

HE remembered that Joan had said to him that never again would she try to explain herself to him and that he must find out for himself. Had he, with this first dim realization, begun to find out? And how could he learn more, and from whom? Was there no one to whom he could speak of her, no one who knew something of her thoughts, her feelings, her emotions? Who could there be? He had barricaded her so successfully from all outside companionship, that there was not a single person in the world who knew anything about her; for her own kinsmen and the village friends of her childhood had never counted with him, and did not count now.

But what about that woman who had brought the message? She would be better than no one. It was little enough she could tell him, of course. But perhaps she could tell him more if he asked her, and in any case it would be an infinite relief to speak of his Joan with some one who had seen her last.

He recalled some of the remarks she had made about Joan. He remembered her appreciation of his little Joan, her belief in her, her partizanship of her, and her sacrifice of the black pearl. A great yearning came over him, and an irresistible impulse to seek her out at once. He had kept her card with a secretive care characteristic of him. At the back of his brain had been a kind of sullen hope that he might get news through her of his wife, if indeed his pride and stubbornness could ever suffer him to reach out for it.

He drove straight off to the Tudor Club and enquired for Rachel Thorne in that queer, excitable way of his which brooked no opposition. The porter said that she was in the club but engaged, and that she had given instructions that she was not to be disturbed either for a visitor or a message.

"Well, she'll have to be disturbed," Horace replied fiercely. "Do you suppose that I've come here for the purpose of being sent away?"

The unfortunate porter did not suppose anything; but this strange and imperious caller, shabby, shuffling and yet distinctly not a negligible quantity, struck him as being more formidable a foe than even Miss Thorne in her wrath to come. She would be angry, but she was not a mad woman. But this man looked half mad, and there might be a scene. As it was, people in the hall were watching him as he stood tapping the floor with his stick and then suddenly brandishing it in the air with a menace by no means mild. It was a choice of two tornados, and the porter, wise man, preferred one with the nature of which he had been long familiar. He went to Miss Rachel Thorne in the little side smoking-room where she was entertaining a gentleman friend.

"I am very sorry to disturb you, madame," he said, quaking in his shoes. "But there is a — gentleman who insists on seeing you. A very excited person, madame. I haven't known what to do. He seems — if I may say so — half mad."

"Half mad," said Rachel Thorne. "How amusing, and stimulating. What is his name?"

"He gave me no name, madame," the porter answered, greatly relieved but amazed by her complaisance; for of course he had no means of knowing that she had been enduring an hour of unmitigated and wholly unexpected boredom.

"Oh well, let him come," Rachel Thorne said.

Her companion, a distinguished historical painter who had been calling on her to ask her to sit for one of his pictures, and who had no gifts of easy conversation, was more than thankful to take this natural opportunity of escape.

"Beautiful, but boring," he said to himself, as he passed out of the Club.

"Distinguished, but dull," she said to herself as she waited for the new visitor. "At least the mad man won't be dull."

Then the porter arrived, followed by Horace Holbrook.

"Why, it's the little wild bird's husband," Rachel Thorne said, rising in her graceful, languid fashion. "And I was going to write to you this very day. I have another message for you. It is funny that I have been chosen by fate to act as accredited messenger. But so it is. One can't account for these ironies of life. I don't pretend to."

"What is the message?" Horace asked half surlily, half eagerly.

"That she's all right, that she got your two cables about money, but that she doesn't need money," Rachel Thorne said. "Also that she has found good friends there and that she is in touch with Crazy Crank, and that no one need worry about her."

"Is that all?" Horace asked shortly.

"All that concerns you," she answered. "I mean, all the actual message. She adds that Keturah also cabled money, and that I'm to thank her and give her a hug. Imagine me giving Keturah a hug. Now can you imagine it? She put that in to amuse me; for Keturah hates me with a holy hate. That shows the little wild thing is in good spirits. Oh, she's all right. I knew Crazy Crank wouldn't let any harm come to her — except by drowning at sea. And as they're both at present

safely on land, they can't for the moment be drowned at sea, can they?"

"I never sent two cables and I don't know who Keturah is," Horace said sullenly.

"Didn't you send two cables?" she asked. "Well, never mind, she has had two. Perhaps the Cable Company in a fit of generosity sent a duplicate. Even companies have been known to be generous on rare occasions. But you don't really mean that you've never heard of Keturah?"

He shook his head.

"Her mother's old friend, her sort of foster grand-aunt or great-grand-aunt," Rachel Thorne explained. "Keturah might be any age."

"I took her away from her surroundings," he said, with a gesture of impatience. "They didn't interest me. We banished them."

Rachel Thorne laughed softly.

"How sublimely selfish," she said pleasantly.

He made no reply, but stared on the ground and kept fidgeting with his stick.

At last, with great effort, as if every word were being wrung from him, he said:

"I came here because I felt I had got to talk to some one who knew my — wife even a little — some one who had been with her — if only for a few hours — after — after she left me — some one who could tell me perhaps what she had spoken of — the drift of her mind — her plans. I felt it to be a necessity to seek you out — some of the things you said about her have haunted me — the breath of fresh air — you are right — she is that — was that — and —"

He broke off, and Rachel Thorne, sorry for his intense suffering, told him in the kindest way some part of the history of her brief acquaintance with Joan. She had told it him before in the studio, and there was really noth-

ing new to say; but she saw that he wanted to ease his heart by speaking of his wife.

Rachel Thorne humored him most willingly. And as she talked, she thought to herself that really he wasn't so hateful after all, and not undistinguished looking either.

"Plans?" she finally said. "No, I'm sure she had no plans. She was on the run, you know, and one doesn't have such ridiculous things as plans when one is on the run. As for her drift of mind, I couldn't say. I don't believe I know what drift of mind exactly is. But I can tell you that she was sick of books and seemed to shy at the sight even of such a harmless volume as my poultry book. Perhaps you'd call that her drift of mind."

"Did she speak of a parrot?" Horace asked, with a sudden irrelevance which struck Rachel Thorne as being exceedingly funny.

"No, I can't say she did," she answered with a smile. "Do you want me to say she did? I wish I could. No, our conversation on birds was confined entirely to guinea-fowls — dying guinea-fowls."

He sat silent after that, but it was obvious that he did not wish to go; and Rachel Thorne leaned back in her chair, entirely patient, and apparently preoccupied in examining the rings on her finger. There was something curiously restful about her presence: a mysterious quality of leisured consideration for others, healing and invaluable in every walk of life. Horace felt its influence. He knew he could sit there until he wanted to go, or remain silent until he cared to ask another question.

"Did she speak of the Renaissance?" he said, after a long period of silence.

"She made the remark that she had had her fill of that portion of the world's history," Rachel Thorne answered. "I really think she rather liked me because I knew nothing about it."

"You've missed a great deal then," Horace said severely.

"Yes, I don't doubt it," Rachel Thorne replied piously. "I try to bear my loss with a chastened resignation."

A ghost of a smile passed over his face, and he rose to go.

"Mr. Holbrook," she said, rising too, "I've told you very little because I know so little myself. But why not seek out Keturah? She's the person that you ought to talk with. Go to her. She's a sort of cook-house-keeper in the house where I go for week-ends and longer sometimes. But I forgot. I've told you that already, and described the unexpected meeting between her and her pet lamb. She's a segment of those surroundings in which you took no interest. Why not begin to take an interest in them now?"

As she spoke, her motive, pure and disinterested at the outset, became tainted with a personal and pernicious thought. She recognized it and herself as hateful, but she could not control it. For the life of her she couldn't. How amusing it would be, for instance, to get him to come and see Keturah whilst she herself was there. And what an adventure it would be to try and captivate this queer, strange creature, who was so different from the men who had hitherto succumbed to her charms. Well, really, that was an idea—something which promised sport and distraction and change—something on new lines, not on the old worn-out, traditional basis. And really the man wasn't unattractive—by no means unattractive, and he was in that condition when kindness and sympathy would make him an easy prey.

"Why not?" she said to herself. "It's distinctly tempting."

But a vision of Joan rose before her mind's eye, and she was ashamed of herself.

"What a woman I am," she thought. "An odious

wretch. That's what I am. Never did I guess that loyalty was going to be so hard. Not another word will I utter to urge him to go and see Keturah either whilst I am there or not there."

Aloud she said, as if continuing her advice:

"And better still than Keturah, there's her own home life in that little village from which you took her. She went back there, you remember. Keturah hurried her pet lamb off from me, and it was there she went. At least she tried to hurry her off — and I — well, I did the rest. You might learn many things about her there."

"I always detested the village," he said half angrily. "I always resented that she'd been born there."

"One has to be born somewhere," Rachel Thorne said cheerfully. "Much better to have been born there than — well, say in a cathedral town, for instance. No chance of a breath of fresh air there."

"I took her away from it," he went on irritably, as if the very thought were annoying him. "I wiped out the memory of it from my mind and hers."

"So you told me before," Rachel Thorne said. "And amazingly selfish it sounded. And silly too. No one can wipe out either for himself or another the remembrances of childhood. I know that myself. I still have an absurd sort of sentimental craving for the surroundings where I was born and bred. One day I shall go back and be entirely bored and disillusioned and want to take the very next aeroplane home again. But I shall go. I feel it in my bones. That little wild bird of yours probably felt it in her feathers. Anyway she went. Why not follow in her flight there?"

He began to brandish his stick about with a nervous impatience.

"I prefer to go and see that woman," he said stubbornly. "Perhaps you'll give me the name of the place."

She gave it to him without comment or encourage-

ment. It was really difficult to keep from inviting him at a time when she knew she would be there; but she restrained herself, and had the inner satisfaction of feeling that she was behaving like a heroine.

"Good-by," he said curtly, and he went to the door, but paused and turned to her again with a half-sulky reluctance of appeal in his manner which struck her as very attractive and made her rôle of heroine doubly difficult.

"If you get further news, you would let me know?" he asked. "I am going to my own home. Here is my card."

She nodded.

"So you are leaving your friend's studio," she said, as she put the card in her satchel. And then she looked up.

To her utter amazement, a complete transformation had come over him. Gone the sulkiness, the fierceness, the imperiousness, the impatience. He stood with bowed head, broken, ashamed, humbled.

In a low voice charged with suffering he said:

"I wasn't worthy to be there. Not worthy."

Then he left her.

CHAPTER VI

THAT was what he had said to Beaudesart, but with much more added to it. For they had talked it out, every bit of it, from beginning to end, and Horace had even described, with a candor ruthless to himself, the workings of his mind, the alterations of malicious intention and deep remorse, the psychology, in fact, of the crime of murder planned and premeditated but not consummated. Beaudesart had been deeply interested, and all the more so, because his curious detachment from circumstance, due partly to a light-hearted irresponsibility and to a large impersonality, made it possible for him to lay no particular stress on the chance fact that he it was who had been destined for the victim.

His freedom from anger and resentment, his generous forgiveness and his great anxiety to protect his old friend from danger, touched Horace to the quick.

Indeed, the outstanding feature of Beaudesart's attitude was this intense desire to shield, to screen. Horace was utterly ashamed and humiliated, but with a humiliation which had nothing ignoble in it. As Bingham had truly said, one could breathe, one could lift up one's head in Beaudesart's atmosphere, no matter what one had done. And Beaudesart insisted on his own share of the blame. Yes, he had been coveting Joan. There was no denying it. He didn't want to deny it. His desire to possess her had not materialized any more than Horace's design to murder him. But the impulse had been there. And the impulse had been the direct cause of Horace's temptation. From now onwards the impulse should be subdued. He too had had his lesson.

"So that's how we stand, Horace," he said. "And now we must pass on and find the right trail again. I shouldn't mind your going away so much if I was surer that you wouldn't drug yourself to death. That's what I fear for you."

"You needn't fear it," Horace answered. "Perhaps that is exactly what I would have done before — before this. But it's up to me to 'make good.' I've got things to do. I must get to work. The Renaissance must be finished, even though I have to finish it alone. It's my work, after all, and nothing, no one can take that from me if I choose to keep it. And I have things to learn — and unlearn. Joan said she would never explain herself again. I have to find out. Perhaps I shall learn. Perhaps I shan't. But I mean to try."

Once or twice before he left London he nearly went to the newspaper shop to see Mrs. Parflete and ask her some questions concerning the ways and views and aspirations of women in these days of a new outlook. They had remained in his memory, rejected and repudiated it is true yet proof against entire dismissal. And now, encouraged by the first faint signs of his capitulation, they rose up, one by one, cautiously, stealthily, but with sure advance. Her words came back to him: "*He'll have to go on scoffing until he has learnt his lesson.*"

He knew she could teach him; and yet for the life of him, he could not bring himself to ask for help and enlightenment. So he lost that chance.

Once he wandered vaguely to the oculist's house in Harley Street, and stood outside for a long time, undecided as to whether he should ask for an interview with the man who had talked with Joan. Finally he shook his head. Why should he? What a poor fool he was. The man wouldn't even remember. And what was there to ask? And of him, a stranger? He realized suddenly that so far as outside people were concerned, he

was in fact as stranded as Joan herself had been. Now he understood why she had been impelled to go to Beaudesart. A human being had to go to some one — yes, had to go to some one. He had cut her off from the whole world.

There had been no choice for her — *through his fault*.

This, then, was the added lesson he learnt before he left London.

So he had gone his way, much to the joy of all Beaudesart's friends. The only person who regretted his departure was Beaudesart himself.

"It's no use pretending I don't miss that gay figure," he said. "I do miss it. The fireside seems desolate, and the electric cooker to which Horace was so devoted, wears a forlorn and reproachful expression."

He would probably have been very wretched if Bingham had not been there to claim his kindness and care. Bingham needed him so much, that for his sake Beaudesart tried to pull himself together at once; and from the amazingly quick improvement in his appearance and bearing, it soon became evident that he had been released from a great strain. The home life of the studio became more normal, and friends began to look in again, so-called respectable people as well as so-called criminals. Maria, who had been in poor health for some time, started to recover tone and a glossiness of coat hardly less superb in blackness than Miss Rachel Thorne's raven locks. Beaudesart had a sudden attack of industry and an outbreak of genius. He worked on his searchlight picture, and began a painting of seagulls in their flight jeweled by the golden sun rays, and another one of a motor omnibus coming into vision in a darkened street: a beautiful and haunting sight. *indeed!*

But now and again he looked rather longingly towards Hereford's forlorn and deserted easel, and a vague uneasiness visited his conscience, reenforced gradually by

regrets and remorse not shadowy nor dim of outline, but substantial and solid.

He realized in fact that he had behaved abominably towards Eminent Counsel. After all, the confounded old hangman had meant well enough, and when you came to think the matter out in cold blood, it was natural enough that he should have wished to protect his friend from the possibilities of a danger which his hateful professional instincts and horrid little penetrating eyes had run to earth. Natural but odious.

Still there it was, he had tried to save a friend, and all he had got for his pains was to be kicked out of the premises! The usual result, of course, of interfering in any one's concerns. A result he probably never anticipated, barred by his profession from any real understanding of human qualities and conditions.

Poor old chap. And really he had been rather brave, for him. Beaudesart reflected that he must have made a tremendous effort of courage to remain in the studio that afternoon when Bingham had arrived from prison. He disliked extremely being in the presence of a criminal lately discharged from prison. It made him feel awkward, uncomfortable, Beaudesart said, conscience-stricken. He was only brave in Court. Well, at any rate on this occasion he had stuck to what he considered his post, and had made a distinct sacrifice of his feelings in order to keep a sentinel eye on Horace, and watch over the welfare of an old friend who was furious with him for his trouble.

And really the studio needed those primroses and blue-bells, those gentians and clover fields. One simply couldn't get on without the help of Nature. Perhaps he would return to his easel if he were asked.

He might, and he might not. Of course he would not be invited to come back unless Bingham sanctioned his return. This was Bingham's time of recuperation;

and nothing must be allowed to interfere with his chance of happiness and his spell of creative work. For the clarionet player was composing a sonata for his beloved instrument, and no jarring note must disturb his own world of sound.

So Beaudesart asked Bingham one day:

"Would you mind if he came back?"

"No," Bingham said. "Let him come back. He doesn't annoy me. He's harmless enough here. He's not responsible for the system he represents. I've no feeling against him. And it's good for him to be here. It gives him a chance, as it gives all of us."

"Your clarionet gives him a chance," Beaudesart said. "That's what I think. I believe the old devil's fond of music. All the same, we can't have him back if he's going to spoil the sonata. His soul's not worth that."

"He won't spoil the sonata," Bingham said, with a smile. "He might spoil it if he didn't come. I should hate to keep him away. You know it wasn't his atmosphere that drove me off that night."

"I know," Beaudesart said, with a nod. And that was the only reference to Horace that ever passed between them. Beaudesart had locked the history of that evening in an iron safe of silence. No one knew anything except that Horace had at last left, and that Henry Hereford was carrying on his intermittent career of artist in another quarter of London.

But now Beaudesart determined to seek him out and reinstate him in his old niche. So, armed with Bingham's consent, he set out for the Police Court where Hereford was sometimes to be found. On his way he called in at the newspaper shop to ask after Mrs. Parflete's old father, who had had another light seizure, and he told her the object of his expedition.

"Well, I'm rather glad, Mr. Beaudesart," she said.

"I'm really rather glad. Niches can only be filled by the people who have always occupied them."

"But you've always hated him, haven't you?" he said. "Why this strange and beauteous transformation?"

She paused a moment, weighed out some tobacco with rather unnecessary intentness, and said:

"I think the time has now come for a confession which I've been longing to make all along, but which I've withheld because Mr. Hereford wished me to."

"Go ahead," Beaudesart said. "This sounds exciting, and exceedingly funny."

"It is funny in one sense, I own," she replied, with a half smile. "But it isn't funny in another sense, Mr. Beaudesart. It's serious — at least for me. It is just this. It was I who asked Mr. Hereford to watch over your safety. If it hadn't been for my prompting, he wouldn't have thought of looking beyond his primrose woods. I'd been uneasy about Mr. Holbrook's queer behavior, and — well — woman's instinct roused my suspicions. I knew you had stirred up the worst in him by your feelings towards his wife."

"And pray what were your suspicions?" Beaudesart asked, turning towards her fiercely.

"I don't believe you would like me to put them into words," she answered bravely, looking him straight in the face. "But I will if you wish me to."

"No," he said excitedly. "No."

"Nor is there any need," she said. "You are safe and well. And Mr. Holbrook has gone. We can leave it at that."

He drew a deep breath. He was evidently torn by strong emotions.

"Yes," he shouted, "it can be left at that. And, by Heaven, it shall be left at that. It's my affair, my affair only, no one else's. Conspirators, were you both? Conspirators for my welfare, I suppose you'll say. Well, let

me just tell you, I won't have my welfare looked after by any benevolent person on earth. And now I'll go."

"I hope you will," Mrs. Parflete said quietly. "If you resent my interference, you must go and resent it in your own home. But I won't be stormed at in my own shop. This is not Billingsgate."

But instead of going, Beaudesart sank into a chair and remained in a silence which Mrs. Parflete did not attempt to interrupt. Finally she left him in possession and went upstairs with a cup of beef tea for her father.

When she returned, Beaudesart rose and held out his hand and said:

"I don't suppose I really resent it in the long run, Mrs. Parflete. It's been the best for him — dear old fellow — as well as for me. The only thing I ask now is that there should be a fresh conspiracy in which I join — a conspiracy of silence between you and me and Hereford — mark you — no questions asked nor answered — no remembrance of the incident — no record — nothing — except a clean slate. Could you agree to this if I forgave you for looking after my so-called welfare?"

"Yes, I could," she said, smiling gravely. "I could — and I will, without fail."

He nodded as he shook hands over the bargain.

"I'm sorry I shouted," he said. "I'm sorry I forgot the locality of the shop. And now I'll dash off and make my peace with that old Court bully. Am I to tell him you've confessed?"

"Yes," she answered, "and that I took all the blame. I want him to know that."

"Why didn't that holy saint want you to share the blame?" Beaudesart asked. "I would rather like to know that."

"Because you couldn't afford to turn away two of your friends at the same time," she answered.

"My welfare again, in fact," he said, making a wry face.

"Perhaps," she answered. "But perhaps also Mr. Holbrook's. There is that view, you know."

Yes, there was that view, he admitted to himself as he went on his way to the Court.

"She's right," he thought. "If things had been allowed to take their course and old Horace had got comfortably into the habit of — well, paying attention to my Bengers' food in that little blue saucepan, we might both of us in time have reached the same destination by different routes. And then there was the moral wrong to him too. She's right. I acknowledge it handsomely, and swallow the dose of welfare."

He arrived at the Court and learnt that Hereford was there. Instead of sending his name in at once by the usher, he passed into the enclosure open to the general public and leaned against the wall, pretending to himself that he wanted to watch the proceedings, but in reality gaining time to gather courage to face the august personage, whom he had all but kicked out of his house.

But after a quarter of an hour or so he began to lose all interest in his own personal concerns, contritions and apprehensions, and indeed all his senses as well. For great powers, what an atmosphere in the Court! No wonder every one was in a comatose condition, overpowered by microbes of bad air and of worse injustice. Why, it would take the brain of a boa-constrictor to think in such pernicious precincts. But of course no one did attempt to think. There was that to be said about it.

The monotonous and antiquated machinery went by itself, the magistrate drowsed in his chair, the police officers rolled off their regulation inexactitudes, the counsel for prosecution pursued the prescribed method of attack, the victim in the dock stood bewildered and en-

tirely helpless, drowsy himself and at the mercy of all these drugged and drowsy representatives of law and order. By Jove, how comic it would be if it weren't so tragic. And the unutterable dullness of it, the insane futility of it. Not an ounce of constructiveness about it — nothing but a ponderous destructiveness. And the appalling thought that if he himself were magistrate, constable, inspector, counsel for prosecution, victim, he would be just the counterpart of any one of them, caught up in the meshes of that net from which there was no escape. Well, thank goodness he could escape now — this moment.

He sent a penciled message to Henry Hereford. He wrote: "Old chap, I've come to this insufferable spot to beg your pardon for my insufferable conduct. But I can't stick it here any longer, and so will return when the Court rises from its slumbers. Don't refuse to see a repentant sinner bearing the name of Will Beaudesart."

When he returned, he was shown into a room where he found Henry Hereford waiting for him.

"Hereford," he said, "I do want you back so. Your easel stands empty and unused."

"Ah," said Hereford grimly. It was evident from his manner that he had enclosed himself in a refrigerator of the latest Arctic date.

"Of course I know I behaved badly," Beaudesart owned. "And I'm sorry. I'm really sorry."

"I accept your apology," Hereford said from his citadel of ice. "But I fear my easel must continue to stand empty and unused."

"Well, of course that's as you decide," Beaudesart said. "I can't wonder you won't come. But you'd be very welcome if you did happen to change your legal mind."

Hereford stared blankly and remained silent.

"You see," continued Beaudesart, "things had tried me a bit. I can't say they hadn't. This isn't an excuse. There is no excuse. It's an explanation. That's all. I believe I had a sort of dim idea that something was wrong. And when you said something was wrong, I got terrified lest you should unearth it. I—I didn't want it unearthed. But you were right."

"Ah, I was right, then, was I?" said Hereford, opening his ice box an infinitesimal, imperceptible fraction of an inch.

It was Beaudesart's turn to take refuge in a frozen fortress.

"No questions asked or answered," he said fiercely. "The chapter is ended. Holbrook and I talked things out. He has gone. I miss him."

"I understand," Hereford said, touched by Beaudesart's magnanimity. "The point is that he has gone. No questions asked or answered."

"Thank you," Beaudesart said, coming back with a sigh of relief to his natural ease of manner. And he added:

"Look here, Mrs. Parflete has been telling me that you and she entered into a secret league to look after my welfare, and that she takes the whole blame for the scheme because she put you up to it. So it seems I punished the wrong person. Well, that often happens, doesn't it?"

A ghost of a smile passed over Henry Hereford's grim face, but he made no comment.

"Anyway," continued Beaudesart, "we've agreed on silence and forgetfulness, and a clean slate. We shook hands on it. Perhaps you could bring yourself to do the same, could you?"

Somewhat slowly Hereford held out a frozen hand.

"Thanks, old fellow," Beaudesart said. "That's very decent of you. Your handshake gives me the shivers,

but I suppose I've deserved them. Well, as I said before, your easel is waiting. Ah, I mustn't forget to tell you that Bingham is with me, and that I asked him whether he'd mind if you were to return. And he said he wouldn't mind at all, and that you were harmless enough in yourself and not responsible for the system. But my stars, what a system!"

As he spoke, he turned his head in the direction of the Court, and then, to relieve his feelings, fanned the air with his soft felt hat.

"Now I'm off," he said cheerily. "This exhilarating interview is over. If you don't come back to paint your clover fields and primrose woods and all your peaceful landscapes, I shall have to try my hand at them myself. One can't get on without Nature. One can't live on searchlights, seagulls, motor omnibuses and clarionets. The thing's impossible. I say, you know, it's awfully funny you and Mrs. Parflete striking up a friendship in this way. It is comic, isn't it? Farewell."

Not a word vouchsafed Mr. Henry Hereford, and not a sign did his manner show of even the faintest capitulation. But that same evening a taxi-cab drove up to the studio, and Eminent Counsel emerged with his primrose wood.

Beaudesart opened the door, and almost knocked him down with delight.

"Come in, old chap," he exclaimed joyously. "Your lonely easel is waiting for you, and my lonely heart is longing to insult you again. All is well."

CHAPTER VII

BEAUDESART had said that the chapter was closed. But not for Holbrook. He continued to have paroxysms of remorse and shame such as overcame him when Rachel Thorne merely mentioned his old friend's name. If he had sinned in thought and nearly in deed as well, he at least suffered the utmost penalty of torture which remorse imposes in a ruthless retaliation. If he had not been upheld by the imperious necessity of his heart, and impelled to discover for himself the meaning of Joan's defection and flight and the part he had unconsciously played, he might have sunk beneath the weight of the horror of his murderous intention, and succumbed entirely to the evil in him. It would have been an easy enough process with his queer and morbid nature and with his drug habits — intermittent, it is true — but frequent when he was in distress.

But he was saved by the effort which his mind was slowly, painfully making to understand the circumstances. Certain flashes of light had broken in on the gloom, and he hoarded the memory of them in secret, as a miser his gold, counting them over, these separate little bits of light, adding them together in the hope of finding that they had reached a total amount of illumination which would dispel the encircling darkness. What had that woman Rachel Thorne said? Something about his sublime selfishness in sweeping Joan's home life out of his horizon. Was she right? Had he been selfish? And had it been so unutterably silly as she seemed to think? Was it true that people retained their early impressions

which no subsequent experiences could remove from the tablets of the mind? Ought he to go to that village which he detested, and search there for some clue to the mystery of Joan's insurgency? No. It would be futile, senseless and entirely distasteful. Distasteful? Well, of course; but one couldn't choose, after all, in such a dilemma. Ought he to go?

He went.

He made his way direct to Joan's old home, the thirteenth-century smithy from which he had taken her more than seven years ago. It was gone, every trace of it except its name, which the Dutch house now occupying its site bore in memory, in honor of it. There was nothing to be learnt here; and with a sigh of relief Horace was turning back when he heard the fierce bark of the bulldog, succeeded by the sound of a woman's most beautiful voice:

"Down, down, Billy," it said. "Down, down, Billy. It's all right. It's all right."

Horace looked round and saw a middle-aged woman of commanding stature, with a splendid head, a fine open countenance and tender dreamy eyes. She was dressed in a loose gray garment hanging straight from her neck, and had the appearance of a prophetess of old rather than of a twentieth-century inhabitant of an ordinary house. She had a pair of pruning scissors in her right hand, for she had been attending to the fruit trees on the sheltered side of the house. In her left she carried a small basket containing the most lovely azaleas which she had culled from the greenhouse, so delicate and tender in coloring of flesh pink, so fragile in form, and of a fragrance faint and refreshing.

Horace was arrested by this unexpected vision. He stood staring, now at this wonderful presence and now at the beautiful flowers. And as he still continued immovable and silent, she approached him:

"Are you interested in these beautiful azaleas?" she asked him.

"They are very wonderful," he said in a low voice which had some tone of reverence in it.

"Yes, they are," she said. "Look at this one and this. I have never seen more delicate tints."

She handed him the basket, and he took it from her awkwardly and a little embarrassed, as one having no easy and natural comradeship with flowers. But as he bent over them and felt against his face the benediction of their touch, some healing influence, of the same nature as that born of Bingham's music, permeated his spirit. And still he lingered, unable to stir. She asked no questions of him, and gave no sign of wonder or impatience that he should thus continue to intrude. Perhaps with her power of divination she knew that here was some one torn by some secret conflict and in need of this moment of passing peace.

At last Holbrook said:

"I thought to find the old smithy here. It used to stand here, I'm sure."

"Yes," she answered. "But it was burnt down. No trace left. Nothing to meet the eye."

"I am glad," he said half to himself. "I dreaded seeing it. And yet I wished to come."

"Not so long ago," she said, "some one else came to see the old smithy. She told us she was the blacksmith's daughter."

Horace looked up.

"She would not come into the new smithy," she continued. "Nothing would persuade her to come in. I think she wanted her old memories to remain untouched by new influences. And that was natural enough."

Horace spoke not a word.

"She slept out of doors that night," she went on. "She slept on that bench yonder. We stole out in the

night and put a warm rug over her. It was all we could do."

Horace turned his eyes towards the bench and kept them there.

"She was mourning over her dead father, I believe," she said. "But in the night her spirit met his spirit once more. I am sure of this. I shall never forget her parting words to me. She said: 'I have heard the sound of my father's anvil. I have seen him at the forge. I had lost him, but now I shall never lose him again. Never.'"

She paused a moment, and then said:

"So many times I think of her, that little unknown bird of passage. The smithy has grown doubly dear to me since she came here and found that which she feared she had lost. For it was ever my hope that the presence of strangers here might not prove hostile to the spirit of the place. And, you see, she was able to give me that assurance."

Then Horace turned towards her.

"Why do you tell me this?" he said, with a touch of irritation in his manner which he tried to subdue. "Why do you suppose I want to know?"

"I didn't suppose anything," she said gently. "It was just a natural impulse to tell you. You see, you, as well as she, came on the same errand. That's all."

"It isn't all," he retorted fiercely. "I tried to make her forget all these things. I believed she had forgotten them. And it appears they were in her heart all the time. Fool that I've been."

With a gesture of angry impatience he cast the flowers from him, and passed on his way without a word of explanation. He walked quickly past the wheelwright's yard and the Wheatsheaf Inn, where he had once stayed for many weeks and where at this moment a cart was drawn up, laden with a huge tree trunk and hauled by

four great horses. He went to the side of the pond, guarded as ever by its three giant elms, and crossed the village green where the children were playing and the village ponies grazing. He scarcely knew in what direction he was going, and didn't care. All he wished was to get out of the place and sweep it once more from his remembrance. So on he hurried past the Giffords' cottage, and up the lane past the two windmills called "The Twins," and towards the barn "Never ending." And there he paused to take his breath and wipe his forehead; for he had walked as if he were trying to win a race with some unseen competitor.

Out of the field opposite came Seth Gifford. He was carrying an ax. He glanced at the man resting by the wayside and noticed that he was a stranger. He was passing on his way with the usual stolid unconcern of a countryman when he suddenly stood still and scratched his head. His face became scarlet.

"Aye, that's him," he said aloud in his slow drawl. "I would know the bloody thief anywhere. That would I."

And back he went, and stood over Holbrook.

"I know ye," he said fiercely. "It's seven year since I saw ye. But I know ye."

"Indeed," said Holbrook, with the careless indifference which he always showed towards the people of the soil. They had never interested him and never would interest him. He did not even now take the trouble to look at the person who was addressing him. He had plucked a few blades of grass, and was fidgeting with them in his restless manner.

"You took my little Joan from me," Seth went on with increasing excitement. "Never will I forgive ye. Bewitched my little Joan—that's what ye did. She'd have loved me right enough if ye'd stayed away. Boy and girl together we'd been and known each other from

the beginning. Many a time I've wanted to ax you, Mister, aye, ax you, and hang for it. And would now — after seven years if —"

"If what?" Holbrook asked, getting up slowly and facing him without flinching.

"If she'd said ye'd been cruel to her or struck a single blow at her," Seth answered, trembling with ill-suppressed rage. "But when she bided here a few weeks ago, she said ye'd never been unkind, but gived her all she wanted, never struck her — never —"

"It's a lie," Holbrook interrupted quietly and with deliberation. "I have struck her."

Seth raised his arm as if for instant attack; but the sight of the man standing fearless and calm, though at the entire mercy of an overwhelming strength, gave him pause. His arm fell to his side. He drew a long breath.

"I'll not touch ye," he said hoarsely. "Joan loaved ye if she lied for ye."

And as if afraid to trust himself a minute longer, he strode off, a fine, powerful figure, his cheeks still flushed, and his blue eyes still menacing.

The episode had been so sudden and swift that it left Horace half stunned and powerless to stir. If he could have moved at the moment, he would have dashed after Seth and, heedless of consequences, dared to speak with him about Joan. For whatever he was, he was at least no coward. But he stood rooted to the ground, staring at Seth's disappearing figure, staring in the same direction long after all signs of it had vanished from view. And when at last he recovered himself the impulse was over. What was there to ask? What could he learn from that yokel? What could a fellow like that know about Joan? Children together — comrades together. And what then? There was nothing in it — absolutely nothing.

This was what he kept on saying to himself because he wanted to believe it, because he hated the village and every one in it and everything connected with it, and because his pride was reluctant to admit that he could find in such a detested setting one single ray of light to add to those other separate little bits of light which he had been accumulating so painfully and slowly. Later, when some of his irritation had passed, he had to own to himself that the village had given him something which he could have found nowhere else, and that not in vain had Rachel Thorne directed his steps towards it. But he had not reached this clearness of vision when he left it that afternoon, left it with a sigh of relief, and yet with an uneasy feeling that he ought to go back and see again that woman at the new smithy and that yokel and all the rest of them — not because he would learn anything to help and guide him: certainly not that: but because he would at least have satisfied himself that he had tested all the material at his disposal.

Twice he turned back, and twice he changed his mind. Finally he passed beyond "Never ending," encountering old Jacob the shepherd, with his flock of sheep following him, old Jacob who had been Joan's firm friend and ally through many a happy year.

But he did not know that, and if he had known, he would have scorned the idea that the old gaffer could have taught him anything about Joan. And yet Jacob probably could have told him more than any one.

Together the shepherd and the blacksmith's daughter for many years had watched the changing seasons, had listened to the voices of Nature, had read her countless signs above, around, everywhere — he the learned Professor, and she the eager scholar in that great University of Nature which knows no boundaries set up by worn-out traditions and stereotyped brains.

He had fostered unconsciously but very surely the

passion for freedom of spirit innate in her, and that detachment from personal detail which makes for freedom of spirit. Yes, if Horace had only known, that old shepherd with the furrowed face and the clear eyes that looked always beyond, beyond, and the thoughts in tune with a large interpretation, held the secret key to Joan's mind. But how was he to know that? He passed him by without so much as a glance. But old Jacob stood for a moment thinking; and all the two hundred sheep waited too.

"Did I know yon man?" he asked himself. "Where did I see yon man before on this earth?"

He shook his head. He could not remember. He would have known a sheep, a star, a flower, a passing breeze, a sighing of the trees in the wind.

Horace slept that night at the nearest town; or rather he tried to sleep, but could not throw off the thoughts aroused in him by his visit to Joan's birthplace. He began to realize what he had learnt there. He had learnt that she had longed for her home, fretted for her father, suffered in believing that she had lost him forever, and rejoiced in a spiritual reunion with him in the very place where she had lived side by side with him in the past.

Horace, at first angry, irritated by this discovery, furious at finding that his fixed plan of separating her entirely from her surroundings had failed in essence if not in execution, began to see dimly that he had been cruel. In imposing his personality on hers, in dominating her by the exercise of his spell, he had taken from her something sacred and precious. She had won it back for herself now. She would never lose it again.

All in vain had been his carefully thought out scheme of life — and cruel. Had she realized the cruelty? Had she hated him for it? Perhaps she had. But it was obvious she had guarded him well from criticism. She had been his champion. She had lied for him. Her

generosity smote him harder than any blow from Seth's strong arm could have done. When at last he slept, he dreamt of Seth, saw him standing over him, saw his arm raised to strike, saw it fall, and woke to the sound of his voice saying:

"Joan loaved ye if she lied for ye. I'll not touch ye."

Yes, all this he had learnt from going to the village; and he knew well that if he could only bring himself to return there, he would learn still more. But he could not. It was impossible to return. Instead, he decided to seek out Keturah. So he hurried over his breakfast, ordered a trap and drove to the address given him by Rachel Thorne. He knocked at the front door of the dwelling-place attached to the farm, and as no one answered, knocked again impatiently. At last Keturah opened the door.

"Are you Keturah?" he asked irritably. "I suppose you are."

"Do you want Miss Thorne?" she said sharply. "She's not here."

And she evidently intended to end the interview by shutting the door in his face.

"I don't want Miss Thorne," he said, putting his foot against the door to prevent her from carrying out her purpose. "I want you. She sent me here to speak to you."

"About what?" Keturah asked, by no means amiably.

"About Joan—about your pet lamb," he said with sudden gentleness. "I'm her husband."

"You can come in," she said, the grimness of her face yielding to a softer expression; and she led him into the sitting-room and pointed to a chair.

"What did ye do to my pet lamb to make her leave ye?" the old woman asked reproachfully. "Not a word can I speak to ye till ye tell me that."

He made no answer.

"Not a word," she repeated stubbornly.

Still he made no answer.

"Not a word," she said, shaking her head; and without any further attempt at persuasion she retired to the kitchen.

"I can be stubborn too," she muttered to herself. "No one can beat old Keturah in stubbornness. When he's ready to speak, he can come and find me."

Left alone, the tired, worn-out man sunk into a chair and closed his eyes. After the long series of exhausting emotions and harassing experiences which he had passed through, Keturah's reception of him was almost more than his strength could bear. He had needed a kind hand stretched out to him, instead of a peremptory questioning flung out in uncompromising fashion. He would have answered it if he could. But he could not. He was done for, disheartened, discouraged. If this was Keturah, the sooner he got away from her the better; and he made one or two vain efforts to force himself to rise and be gone.

"It's no use," he said. "I can't."

For a while he remained passive and inert.

Then he said:

"I must, I will."

He opened his eyes, and as he rose, a low cry broke from his lips. For there, gazing at him with that eager look he knew so well, was Beaudesart's marvelous portrait of Joan given by him to the raven-haired woman. It seemed in very truth to be her living presence.

"Joan!" he cried. "Joan!"

He fell back into the chair, and lost consciousness.

An hour passed, and still pet lamb's husband had not capitulated. Keturah went out into the orchard to feed the fowls, and when she returned, she began to wonder whether perhaps he had gone away: for she heard no sound in the room, and she felt no sensation of human life around her. She was accustomed to loneliness, and

she knew well by instinct when she was alone and when not alone. She was alone now, she said. She opened the door, and found she was right, and yet not right. His physical presence was there, but — was he dead?

In a minute she was by his side, her seventy years melting away like magic in her impulse to help. Keturah had been a good nurse in her time, and her knowledge and resourcefulness did not fail her now. She saw immediately from his breathing that he was not dead. She slipped him gently on to the floor, and did all she knew to restore him to consciousness. But it was a long time before he showed any signs of returning life, for his habit of drug taking had impaired his recuperative forces.

At last she was rewarded for all her pains, and she kept him lying there, watching him like a lynx until she heard the voice of one of the farm laborers outside and knew that she could now summon further aid. Then she had him carried up to bed, and remained all night by his side, sleepless, alert, with the born nurse's quiet assumption of responsibility and protectiveness. Once or twice she muttered to herself as if in excuse for her kindness to him:

"He is my pet lamb's husband, after all."

And once she said:

"Perhaps I was too hard on the poor, stubborn creature."

Throughout the next day he lay in a state of comatose exhaustion, and not a word passed between them; but towards the evening he roused himself a little, and after staring at her a long time, he said in a low voice:

"Keturah, I struck her."

"She said ye didn't strike her," Keturah said. "I asked her."

"She lied," he answered. "I struck her."

"Then more shame to ye," Keturah retorted fiercely.

"I know," he said. "But it wasn't for that she left

me. She told me she couldn't explain. She told me I must find out."

"Well, have ye found out?" Keturah asked a little less fiercely.

"Glimmerings, glimmerings," he murmured; and with that he fell asleep again.

Keturah evidently considered that he had made some attempt to conciliate her by some kind of confession, for the next day her manner was distinctly gentler. She sat near him and knitted whilst she told him many little stories she could remember about her pet lamb: things simple enough, it is true, and of no great psychological value: things he would have scorned to listen to a few weeks, a few days ago. But now it soothed him, comforted him to hear them; and the relating of them established between him and the old woman a curious kind of intimate comradeship which formed a connecting bridge over that gulf separating him from Joan's childhood—that gulf planned and fashioned by his own stubborn imperiousness. But he got not a particle of sympathy over pet lamb's defection and departure! On the contrary it appeared to amuse her vastly that pet lamb *had* given him the slip.

"Many a wife since the flood has wanted to do the same," she said with a chuckle. "And many a husband since the flood would have learnt a lesson then, I'm thinking."

She laughed softly.

"Not that I'd have laughed if she'd gone off with another man," she said. "My lambkin would always have been my lambkin, whatever she did. Only I'd not have laughed then."

"You showed your sympathy by sending her money," he said surlily, resentfully.

"Money? I sent her no money," Keturah said, shak-

ing her head. "How could I? I didn't know where my lambkin had gone."

"But Miss Thorne told me she'd received it and that she wanted you to be thanked," he said, frowning. "That was the message. I remember it distinctly."

"Belike she sent it herself," Keturah answered after a long pause, "knowing my lambkin wouldn't take it from such as her because ——"

Keturah broke off. She was evidently much moved by Rachel Thorne's thoughtfulness.

"There's good things in her," she muttered. "There's good things in that creature."

The "creature" arrived unexpectedly the following afternoon, and soon learnt from Keturah the whole story of Horace's arrival and sudden illness.

"I couldn't move him," the old woman said half defiantly.

"I wouldn't have wished you to," Rachel Thorne answered cheerfully. "You know perfectly well that I adore all tramps. It's you that have been horrid about tramps, Keturah, not I. Of course we must look after them."

But alone she said to herself:

"Well now, here's a strange happening. I behave like a heroine — a true heroine — and refrain from meddling with him. I keep my word to that little wild thing — and with a good deal of difficulty. I resist the temptation to come here at once and see if he turns up. And when I do come, I find him already here, and comfortably installed in the spare bedroom! If life is not funny, then my name is not Rachel Thorne, and my hair is not raven black. Either fate intends me to become a still greater heroine, or indicates how ridiculous it is to fight against my natural disposition. Now which is it?"

She was frightfully amused, and had several attacks of

silent laughter over the situation. She reflected, too, that if Sebert Renshaw arrived on the scene, that would add to the comedy; and although she was sick and tired of him, she really rather hoped he would put in an appearance for the sake of the complications which would be sure to arise. She saw the whole scene with her mind's eye; and tears of suppressed amusement coursed down her cheeks.

That night when she was going to bed, a knock came at her door, and old Keturah stood there, with something in her hand which looked like a money pouch. Her manner, usually so grim and disagreeable towards the raven-haired woman, was gentle and almost pleading as with trembling fingers, she drew out nineteen sovereigns and laid them on the dressing table.

"Take them," she said. "Ye did the thing I'd fain have done when ye sent my lambkin a sum of money in my name. Ye did the thing that pleased me. Ye took thought for her, and in the right way."

Rachel Thorne looked at her and at the sovereigns and the little pouch, and unfastening the last hairpin from her hair, let her wonderful raven locks fall in their rich profusion. Very beautiful was this vision of her; and it stirred even old Keturah to an impulsive admiration.

"Aye, aye, but ye're a beautiful creature," she said, staring at her. "And why aren't ye good, too?"

"Ah, that's what I want to know, Keturah," Rachel Thorne said good-naturedly. "Well, well, so those are your savings in that funny little pouch. How much better than Mexican Railways or house property. And am I really to refund myself for the fifteen pounds I sent your lambkin? You see, this is how the case stood. I knew he'd probably send her money — her husband, I mean. I also knew she'd never touch it. I also knew she'd never use any coming from me. I suffered over that thought, Keturah. You mightn't think it, but I did. I really wish that I could have sent it to her in my own

name, and that when she'd got it, she would have said: 'Money from the raven-haired woman. I feel I can use it.' But of course she would have said: 'Money from the raven-haired woman. I feel I cannot use it.'"

Keturah nodded.

"So you see," continued Rachel Thorne, "I borrowed your name. But it never struck me you would get to know. I suppose you could not be generous and let me retain this little bit of satisfaction all to myself?"

Keturah shook her head.

"No," she said emphatically. "No."

"No," Rachel Thorne said with sudden anger, tossing her mass of hair aside. "No, of course not. I couldn't expect a generous action from a virtuous person, could I? Oh, I'm sick of you, Keturah. If it didn't suit my convenience to use my friend's house at my own sweet will, I'd never set eyes on you again. I'd seek fresh pastures at once and be rid of you."

"My lambkin can't have money earned in a wrong way," Keturah said. "She can't. She shan't."

"You old idiot," Rachel Thorne said, stamping her foot, "do you suppose I'd put that indignity on her? If you must know, I sold an old family picture for the purpose. Will that content you?"

Keturah hesitated a moment, and then slowly, one by one, put the sovereigns back into the pouch.

Keturah never knew how far her yielding of this point went towards restraining Rachel Thorne in the designs which in spite of all her good resolutions, she could not help forming to amuse herself with Horace Hölbrook. If Keturah had refused her, the devil of defiance in her would have got the upper hand; and she would have followed his lead at the expense of every better prompting, gladly, too, and with a sigh of relief that fate had freed her from the tyranny of ridiculous and annoying scruples.

But the old woman's concession softened her, sobered her, made her a responsible partner in the safe-guarding of Joan's interests, and made her remember that she had been put on her honor by that little wild bird, yes, and chosen instead of that horrid old Keturah for the office of trusted representative. No, she mustn't fail.

But how incredibly, preposterously difficult it was to behave oneself — such a nuisance, too. And the prey so tempting, because so unutterably, farcically sullen and depressing! She laughed to think of him! And under her own roof too! Imagine that. Placed there and detained there by destiny. Now could it be demanded of her that she, Rachel of the raven hair, should stand up to destiny? And what claim, after all, had that new friend on her? Absolutely none. They had met for a minute. That was all.

And pray, had one to sacrifice all one's natural inclinations and tendencies for the sake of a person whom one had known, so to speak, for a minute? Entirely absurd, of course. But then everything in life was absurd. Absurd, for instance, to speak disparagingly of a minute, which was really of enormous capacity, capable of containing all one's unfulfilled ideals, checked aspirations, spurned opportunities.

That really was the claim. And the little wild bird was only the outward and visible sign of it. Symbolic, they called it, didn't they? Symbolic it might be — but a sickening, insufferable nuisance all the same. Well — well —

She fell asleep.

The next morning, when Horace crept down for the first time, she was waiting for him in the orchard; and very lovely she looked in a simple, yet elaborate garden attire with a faultless picture hat which toned in with the blue sky, the fleecy white clouds and all the sweet green things around, and completed a radiant vision of beauty

at one with Nature. He stood arrested by this vision, and Rachel Thorne knew it — so well she understood the power and charm of her physical presence.

"There now," she thought. "See how easy it would be. And why not?"

Aloud she said:

"I hope you are really, really better, and haven't made a ridiculous and insane effort to get up before you ought to."

"No," he answered, sitting down on the chair by her. "I am better. I ought to apologize for having been taken ill here and for staying on in this cool sort of way."

"I hope you won't do anything so silly," she said, smiling. "The house was here and Keturah was here, and your illness was here; and the bits all fitted in together like the latest and most improved kind of jigsaw puzzle."

A faint smile passed over his face but vanished at once.

"The village was too much for me," he said after a pause. "I hated it."

"Well, you didn't go there expecting to like it, did you?" she asked. "You went to learn things, I suppose. It's never gay learning things. Helpful perhaps in the long run, but gay — never."

"No," he said.

"I've never learnt valuable lessons from circumstances or people without becoming perishingly depressed," Rachel Thorne went on. "Except from that little wild thing of yours. She is the one exception, and will remain so, I believe. And she exhilarates me."

"What did you learn from her?" he asked without looking up.

"Oh, I haven't got a categorical mind, thank goodness," she answered. "I couldn't make a catalogue to save my soul. I never could have taken the post of librarian. I don't think I could have compiled a grocer's list either."

"You said something about a breath of fresh air," he said, still not looking up.

"Did I?" she asked cheerfully. "Of course I did, now I remember. I had forgotten for the moment how clever I was. For those few words sum up the whole thing. It looks almost as if I ought to have been a writer. I would certainly seem to have the gift of expression."

Again a faint smile passed over his face. He found her very attractive, with her whimsical charm and indolent brightness.

"Keturah has been good to me," he said after another pause. "She has talked to me about — about — my wife. We understand each other a little."

"Well, that's a good thing," Rachel Thorne said. "And I'm not surprised. I have always believed that Keturah could be entrancing if she chose. It is true I've had no encouragement for this belief. But what does that matter. One either believes or doesn't believe. And there you are."

Again there was a pause, and at last she said:

"Why don't you make a dash for America and find your wife? Why not? You could easily trace Crazy Crank, you know. You could find her on the vastest continent, on the boundless ocean, or in the limitless air. Crazy Crank would leave an unfailing trail behind her everywhere she went. And having pounced on her, you could soon pounce on that little wild thing."

"Never," he said with sudden fierceness. "If she returns, she returns. Never will I seek her. I have other things to do. I have to work at the Renaissance."

She laughed a little soft laugh.

"Ah," she said. "I forgot you were a scholar. Of course you have to work at the Renaissance. But before you plunge into those remote times again, I should really advise that you remain a little longer under old Keturah's care. Mercifully I know nothing about the Renaissance,

but it sounds as if it would require tons and tons of renewed and resisting strength. Beef tea might help. Keturah's beef tea is peerless. Once, when she was in a good temper, she saved the lives of two guinea-fowls with her beef tea. I advise you to remember this. And guinea-fowls are proverbially delicate, you know."

Again that same smile passed over his face. He settled himself more comfortably in the chair, and with a sense of well-being listened to her pleasant chatter, which was not continuous by any means, but appropriately intermittent. She seemed equally willing to fall into long silences, or to break them, according as occasion demanded. Not once did she make an inopportune remark; not once did she jar on him. He was enjoying, in fact, a distinct spell of relaxation. He was forgetting for a while all his troubles, all his regrets—and his great remorse. He was so obviously contented and pleased that Rachel Thorne knew she had made no mistake in supposing that she could easily win him if she chose. And was she going to choose? She asked herself that again and again. Why shouldn't she? Why shouldn't she stay on and amuse herself? She fought that battle once more, a pitched battle it was, too—and she decided to go.

"I'll be a heroine and go," she said to herself, "go this very afternoon. If I stayed, I should end by disgracing myself. I know I should. I'll be off, and leave him to Keturah and the beef tea."

When she had finally resolved to abide by this decision, she rose in her leisurely and graceful manner, and spreading her hands out towards the green things, said:

"What a shame that I have to leave all this greenery and go back to London to-day."

"Go back to London to-day," he repeated in a voice in which there was a distinct note of disappointment and even of dismay.

She heard it—and for the moment she paused and

wavered. Should she stay after all? It would be such fun — such fun. Was there really any reason why she shouldn't stay? No, none really. After all, that little wild bird had gone off and left her husband in the lurch. She would not have abandoned him in this casual fashion if she *had* cared for him very much. And probably she would not mind very much if some other woman did come along and amuse herself a little with him. And really when you began to analyze it, she had not even the right to be considered in the matter seeing that she had dashed off on her own account and left him to his own devices. Why then should she be studied? And yet——

The mood passed. The hesitation was over. The raven-haired woman rose to the occasion demanded of her by her better self.

"Yes, isn't it a bore?" she said, smiling deprecatingly. "I have to go this very afternoon. Lawyers, of course. Aren't they odious creatures? I dislike them more and more as the years go on, don't you? Always wanting documents which have to be found instantly and which you've carefully put away in a distant spot somewhere near the North Pole. Well, I've unearthed the wretched rubbish and must take it back to town at once. And all they'll do with it when they've got it, is to go to sleep over it! Long, long weeks of mysterious sleep — and then a long, long bill of mysterious costs."

"Do stay," he urged. "Let the lawyers wait for the wretched rubbish."

"Impossible," she said, shaking her head gravely.

She kept to her resolution and went that same afternoon.



PART IV

CHAPTER I

JOAN came back from the famous publishing house of Messrs. R. W. Post & Co. armed with a presentation copy of *Gardens of the Italian Renaissance*, a gift from the head of the firm, and with an agreement to begin work the next day. Miss Byrne was thrilled by the news, and Mr. Homer S. Perry who was in the publishing trade and who had been convinced that the English woman knew nothing about books, had to undergo a fair amount of good-natured rallying, in which Miss Emory, the librarian who had supported him in his views, was called upon to share.

But they were all delighted; and although they had shown Joan endless kindnesses of an unusual nature before this flattering cachet had been put upon her capabilities, they now gave extra proof of their interest and esteem, and admitted her definitely into their inner circle. And as she now had money to pay her way comfortably, she was able to accept the invitation extended her to become a member of the dinner club to which Miss Byrne herself belonged. Greenwich Village saw her frequently, too; and she slipped into the everyday life of an American woman worker as if to the manner born.

She worked hard and long at the Renaissance as she had promised, but at first without enthusiasm.

She passed through various phases of distaste and disinclination for her task; but her worst agony of surrender had been lived through at the moment when she

realized that she had to give in; and she curbed her impatience and disciplined her secret rebelliousness, and thus cleared the way unconsciously for other feelings to creep into her breast. First came humor.

It was really very funny to think that here she was in America, immersed in the very work from which she had fled so thankfully in England. The raven-haired woman would be amused. So would anyone. Seven years of the Renaissance, then a short interval of Crazy Crank, and then the Renaissance again! It certainly was not much of a record of adventure. All you could claim was that the setting was new: New York City instead of the lonely barn house in England; mountainous buildings instead of moors; deafening noises instead of deepening silences; and no Horace.

Well, was that such a relief after all?

It was the first time Joan had asked herself that question and she evaded the answering of it stubbornly, resolutely, and instead concentrated grimly on the notes and proofs which she was correcting, and the introductions which she was writing to the separate histories of Florence, Ferrara and Perugia. In spite of herself, the scholar in her became interested and critical. She began to compare this man's work with that of Horace, and found it strangely wanting in scope, in breadth of view, in grasp, and altogether lacking in psychological value as conceived and presented by Horace. An entirely impersonal admiration for Horace's scholarship began to advance stealthily on her; and as it approached nearer to her and more confidently, it was joined by personal thoughts and memories of him. Soon this little pursuing cohort was reenforced by vague remorse for having abandoned him and vague longings for his companionship.

But one feeling was by no means vague. It was definite, acute. It was shame for having destroyed his notebooks. In working at the Renaissance again, Joan

realized the enormity of her ruthlessness in burning that record of his thoughts and views, compiled by her, it is true, but nevertheless the work of his brain, the storehouse of his mind entrusted to her keeping and by her sacrificed ignobly. She hated her impetuous folly. Over and over again she murmured: "If only I could undo that."

She longed to tell him just that much. But she could not bring herself to write to him. Every time she tried, her pride forbade.

"No," she always said, with a return of fierceness. "No. It is for him to send me a sign that he understands at last the tyranny he imposed on me and from which I fled."

All she was able to accomplish in this respect was to post him the book, *Gardens of the Italian Renaissance*. But she did not even write his name in it.

She was not, of course, continuously obsessed by this bitter regret. It visited her in intermittent attacks; and then nothing consoled her, nothing appealed to her, neither a trip down the Bay, nor her favorite Woolworth Building, nor an ascent to a fortieth story, nor a vision of the lights of the City from the New Jersey shore. But this remorse was never accompanied by any wish to return to him and to that isolated life at the barn house. Yet at times she would have given a good deal to look up from her table at Messrs. R. W. Post's and see him sitting at the desk next to her as in the barn house, or to hear his voice, querulous and irritable if tired, dictating some masterly summary of a difficult and intricate episode in Renaissance history. Often she found herself saying aloud, "Horace would never pass this," or, "Horace would want to dispute this point with his last breath."

And once she said: "I'm positively sure that Horace would have a fit of rage and want to knock the man down."

Then she laughed light-heartedly. She could see the scene in every detail.

"The man would deserve it," she said defiantly, as if to an accuser. "I take Horace's part entirely. It is an outrage not to have understood better the meaning of Pico della Mirandola's life and all that his conversion to Savonarola's teaching stood for in those days."

In this way Joan was drawing nearer to Horace again, and unconsciously losing any lingering remnant of resentment that she owed her education to him. It was a step onward in her development, a leap forward in the direction of true freedom, a breaking down of the bondage of an ungenerous ingratitude.

She also developed in other ways, for her life in New York, the conditions under which she was working, and her everyday contact with women whose freedom of action, opportunity and outlook was a matter of course, got her quickly over the ground traveled painfully for long years by many others at home, not isolated as she had been, but nevertheless severely handicapped by absurd traditions and tiresome obstacles. She stepped, in fact, into the inheritance of a modern woman, an inheritance for which she was ready, equipped without any training, without any inculcation of principles and theories, and entirely without the influence of a compelling leadership.

All she had needed was the impetus of her own personal rebellion against personal limitation of circumstance to carry her direct towards the larger horizon of an impersonal outlook; and that night's experience at the Night Court had roused in her feelings and thoughts which she knew would never die down into an unconcerned indifference. No instincts of a reformer had little Joan. She had not been born to fight injustices, to redress wrongs. Never in her life could she have developed in that direction.

But at least she had the capacity for seeing, visualizing,

understanding quickly, intensely, and with a large interpretation. And this quality in her grew apace, being another expression of that very elasticity of temperament which Horace admired so much, and on which he knew full well that he had traded with a selfish unscrupulousness.

So although she was working at her old task, her interests broadened all the time, and her attitude itself towards the Renaissance underwent a subtle change for the simple reason that her mind was not permanently imprisoned as before, but had access to outside channels of communication with modern life.

But for those intermittent attacks of remorse about the notebooks and an occasional spasm of longing to be able to overcome her pride and write to him, she would have been exceedingly happy.

She said with Walt Whitman:

"From this hour I ordain myself loos'd of limits and imaginary
lives,
Going where I list, my own master, total and absolute.
Listening to others, considering well what they say,
Pausing, searching, receiving, contemplating
Gently, but with undeniable will, divesting myself of the holds
that would hold me.
I inhale great draughts of space,
The east and the west are mine, and the north and the south are
mine.

.

All seems beautiful to me,
I can repeat over to men and women, You have done such good
to me I would do the same to you."

She wrote to Crazy Crank that she was happy, and that she had succeeded in obtaining employment — without references again! She added that at the moment of writing, she was boiling down the lives of the Borgias. Crazy Crank answered:

"No wonder you needed no references for the work to which you refer. If I remember anything of the Borgia family, references of respectability of character would be a positive hindrance in your relationship with them. I am glad you are happy. What about that husband of yours whom I thought you had buried? Or did you say you hadn't buried him? I forget. I am not returning yet to meet our doom on the Atlantic. My brother is ailing, and I cannot leave him. His friend is here with us — a tea-planter from Ceylon. Clarke is his name. If he ever writes to you to come, you'll know I want you. I was half tempted to bring you with me — but you've been better where you are with the Borgia family.

"E. WALPOLE."

Joan wrote short letters to Rachel Thorne, and always ended with the request that the raven-haired woman would let her husband know "that she was all right."

She never sent a message of greeting for him, although all the time she was thinking of him in connection with her work at the publishers.

Here is one of her short letters:—

"I am waiting on in New York until I hear from Mrs. Walpole that she is ready to return. Her brother is ill, and she writes that for the moment she has no definite plans. I suppose I shall eventually return with her — but we shall see. The life here interests me very much. I like it immensely. I like the scurry, the bustle, the activity. All the more so because fundamentally no one is in a hurry! I tease my comrades by speaking of 'the leisured American public.' You should hear a business man on the telephone. That would give you some idea of the time he has at his disposal. And one has to wait an endless time in restaurants before one is served. No one seems to mind about that either. I have found some work to do which keeps me going, and so I haven't had to use any of dear old Keturah's money — bless her. I

nearly had to, but something turned up. I will tell you about it later, not now. You'd laugh as much as I do — now. I assure you I didn't laugh at first. I was furious with fate and ground my teeth. For this job is directly concerned with books after all! Not even poultry books, as a concession to my pride, as a mitigation of my humiliation. But real books. Apparently I'm not destined to get away from books in any quarter of the globe. I've had amazing kindness here from strangers who, like yourself, raven-haired woman, are strangers no longer. Never shall I forget waking up in that great cathedral of a barn, and finding the raven-haired woman bending over me. Tell my husband that I am all right."

One day she went with a flaming face to Mr. Post and told him that she found it almost impossible to continue the work with which he had entrusted her.

"I don't see how I can — I don't see how I can," she said excitedly.

"Is it another attack of reluctance coming on again?" he asked. "I thought that had altogether subsided, and that you had become reconciled to the Renaissance."

"It isn't reluctance," she answered. "All the reluctance has passed away. It's rage. Indignation. You see, Mr. Post, the author's views and methods are so utterly opposed to —"

She broke off.

"Well?" he asked not unkindly, for he saw that she was strangely agitated.

"To my husband's," she said. "To what I have learnt from him, to what I have imbibed from him. I feel as if I were being disloyal to the very finest part of his brain."

She was amazed at herself as she spoke, and yet she could not have checked herself, wouldn't have wished to check herself. She might leave him, revolt against his tyranny, his selfishness, and be sick and tired of the whole

set of circumstances in which she had been tied and bound by him, but when it came to an actual question of disloyalty to the most wonderful part of Horace's brain — and she believed it was wonderful — she couldn't stand it — she simply couldn't.

Aloud she said:

"I assure you, I don't know how to let some of the passages stand. You wouldn't believe how I suffer over them. I never knew I cared so much about what I'd learnt. Instead of correcting and revising the text and writing the introductions from the author's notes, I'd like to burn them, Mr. Post — indeed I would."

It was not the first time that Joan had spoken to Mr. Post about her husband. On starting her work for the firm she had felt it incumbent on her to explain why she had come from England and what she had meant on a previous occasion by speaking of a bondage which had become intolerable.

It was little enough she had said, her reserve having been due partly to a loyalty which certainly seemed curiously out of keeping with the circumstances of her escape, and partly to the immense interest attaching to her new life which had blotted out for the moment the importance of her past. But Mr. Post had gathered enough to understand her state of mind and her position.

And he left it at that. He had been interested in her from the beginning; and nothing had occurred to make him regret that he had engaged her for this Renaissance task. She had been dutiful, diligent and exceedingly capable, and, as time went on, even joyous. In fact he had nothing to complain of; and his somewhat erratic action had been justified by its results.

But although he had intermittent, unbusinesslike impulses, business was in the long run the main concern of his life and the most important meaning of his mind. He now took an entirely business view of Joan's critical

attitude towards this Renaissance book. He frowned, tapped the desk with his fingers and said curtly:

"You were not engaged to burn the book, Mrs. Holbrook. You were engaged to revise, complete and enlarge it. Your husband's views and methods may be quite astonishingly inspired for all I know; but he's not the author we're dealing with at this moment. Please remember this. You undertook the work; and I expect you to finish it on the lines indicated."

"Very well," she said with a sort of sulky resignation which almost brought a smile to the publisher's face.

On the day when she brought him the whole book finished, he said to her:

"That's all right, then. 'And now if it's any comfort to you to know it, I don't mind telling you that some of the author's views have tried me too. I too have felt stirred and indignant. I consider, for instance, that he has completely misunderstood Machiavelli.'"

Her face brightened instantly.

"Yes, yes," she said excitedly. "I feel that to my bones."

"And he certainly hasn't done justice on the whole to poor Lodovico il Moro," he said.

"Nor to César Borgia with all his crimes," Joan said staunchly.

"And I must say I was entirely disappointed with his account of Guidobaldo and the Court of Urbino," he said.

"Ah, I am glad to hear you say that," Joan exclaimed.

"That's one of the refreshing bits in the Renaissance; and one can't hear enough of it. This description is so cut and dried, isn't it? I've always loved the Court of Urbino, 'the home of mirth and joy.' I've had more pleasure over that than anything in the Renaissance. What splendid people, weren't they? I've always been in love with Guidobaldo, yes, and with Castiglione too. This

author isn't half enthusiastic enough about them. He hasn't cared. That's what it is."

Mr. Post was silent a moment, and then said:

"When you were working on this book, it was necessary for me to remind you that your husband's mind and method were of no importance to me. But I rather hated doing it. Still, business is business, and it had to be done. But I repeat, I hated doing it. And do you know why?"

She was silent. If she knew, she gave no sign.

"Because," he continued, "I saw that the revival of your enthusiasm for the Renaissance meant probably also the revival of something else you had lost — pride in that scholar husband's scholarship. I really hated to check it, Mrs. Holbrook."

Her face flushed.

"You didn't check it," she said. "You stimulated it."

"Ah well, I'm glad," he said. "Then on the whole, you've taken no harm from this episode in the danger zone?"

"None," she answered with a smile.

"Parted with none of your precious freedom?" he asked half teasingly.

"I don't quite know yet, Mr. Post," she replied a little wistfully. "Sometimes I think I've parted with some of it, and at other times that I've got more of it. I'm not sure."

"And what are you going to do now?" he asked.

"I shall wait on here until Mrs. Walpole returns," Joan answered, "and then I suppose we shall cross the Atlantic together. And after that ——"

She broke off.

"Well, that's about as far as I have got," she added abruptly.

"Who knows," he said, "perhaps some day I may be publishing the Renaissance history written by your husband and yourself."

"Not by me," she said with sudden intensity. "Never by me. I'm only a ——"

She stopped short. She was going to say "parrot." But the word died on her lips. The bitter thought perished beforehand with its burden of discord.

That night Joan made the following entry in her notebook:—

"So now I have finished that Renaissance work which I undertook so reluctantly and over which I have got so increasingly angry, not because I was doing it—that's the funny part—I wasn't a bit angry about *that* as the days went on—but because the book itself was so poor. When I think of Horace's book and of Horace's mind, I'm lost in admiration. And I don't quite know what has happened to me, but the truth is—that now I don't resent so much having learnt everything from him. It would be a lie to say I did. I begin to think I should never have ended up in a rebellion of resentment if he'd left me even a fragment of my own individuality and birthright.

"At one time I thought I could never forgive him for separating me even from my desire to keep in touch with my own people and my old surroundings—with my father, who meant so much to me. Even from my desire, mark you. That's the worst part of it for me.

"For the fact stares me in the face that I didn't care a straw that I wasn't in touch with them. And when I began to care, it was too late. Too late in one sense, yet not in another. For it is borne in on me with increasing certainty and consolation that I've found my father again, found them all again. Never shall I lose that sweet vision of my home. It will rise before me whenever I need it. And all the lovely things of the past which were of any real value to me are weaving themselves into my present like a blessing, and helping me to go forward without too much remorse—and with a lessening anger against Horace.

"An ever lessening anger. For if I hadn't been so weak and submissive, he couldn't have put such a strong influence on me. So it's not just to continue to hate him for that. And I don't hate him. But I could never return to live the old life. Never.

"That's quite clear to me. If we ever come together again, it would have to be on new lines. Plans? No plans at present, I'm thankful to say, except to go with Miss Byrne to Atlantic City for an outing now that my work is over. Oh, that author! How I'd like to summon him to a mortal duel on behalf of some of my dear old Renaissance bores. Boring, but beloved! Now fancy confessing to that. Wouldn't Horace be pleased."

A day or two after this entry, she and Miss Byrne were spirited off by a rich friend of Miss Byrne's to Atlantic City, taking a look at Philadelphia on their way. There Joan saw Independence Hall and the East Room in which the Declaration of Independence was signed, and the Liberty Bell, the sight of which thrilled her to her depths. At Atlantic City she saw all sorts and conditions of Americans disporting themselves in packed crowds on the "board walk," wheeled up and down in "rolling chairs" by colored men, and amusing themselves at the shooting-ranges and side-shows of every description. Bathing pavilions, restaurants, knickknack shops, candy and ice-cream counters, moving pictures, scenic railways and the like were lined up like a regiment along the whole length of the "board walk," and thousands of people, massed together like ants, occupied its whole breadth. A few solitary units wandered by the silver rim of the beautiful, deserted sea.

Joan ran down to greet it with that passionate joy known only to an islander, to kneel near it, to feel the touch of it on her face, her hands, to play, as a child of nature, by its endearing side, to search for pebbles, to gather seaweed and shells. And when she came up laden

with treasure trove and her eager face shining with a rapture which pervaded her being, Miss Byrne, who had always maintained that she was a spirit, said to her friend secretly :

“ There now, if Joan Holbrook isn’t a spirit, don’t let me hear the name of Abraham Lincoln again.”

When they returned home from Atlantic City, Joan found a letter from James Clarke, who was writing, so he said, at Mrs. Walpole’s request.

He told her that money had been telegraphed to her at the post office, and that she was to start at once for Southern California. Mrs. Walpole’s brother had been very ill ; but there had been no reason to suppose that he would not recover. However, he had died suddenly ; and the shock had entirely upset Mrs. Walpole. She wanted her fellow-traveler as soon as possible.

“ She asks me to add,” wrote James Clarke, “ that your presence would comfort her a good deal, and that as you probably have no plans, this plan is as good as anything else unexpected. Also she thinks you have spent enough time with the Borgia family.”

There was also a telegram which said :—

“ Mrs. Walpole rather worse. Hurry all you can.”

Then it was, in talking things out with Miss Byrne and settling up money matters, that Joan learnt how Crazy Crank had taken thought for her, paid part of the rent of the room in Miss Byrne’s apartment for several months, and given instructions that if she were in any trouble she was to be helped and looked after without fail, but by no means interfered with or sheltered in any unwelcome way if things appeared to be going well with her and she were finding her feet for herself.

Crazy Crank had impressed it on Miss Byrne that she was independent by nature, and proud — fiercely proud

—and quite enterprising enough to carve out a career for herself in any quarter of the globe. So she was to be let alone, free, untrammelled, with a friend “standing by” in the distance, in silence, in secret, yet ready to take action at the first signal of distress.

Joan wept when she heard this story of true kindness; and a barrier of self-containedness broke down, revealing a larger scene, a wider horizon, an escape from the limitations imposed by the very passion of freedom itself. Every one had been good to her and taken thought for her: Horace, old Keturah, so she thought, and poor dear old Crazy Crank, now lying ill and wanting her, and these bricks of American comrades who had never allowed her to feel like a stranger in a strange land.

They had opened their homes to her, shared ungrudgingly with her their passing pleasures as well as the priceless possession of their telephones—those fetishes of their lives—shown her not only the things they liked but the things they thought she would like, made her understand clearly that they too loved the England which was her home, and the amusing and antiquated English customs so funny and so dear.

They had taught her unconsciously new lessons of life's activities, possibilities and expansions, and unfolded to her unwittingly, yet none the less convincingly, the message and meaning of their great country and the value to the whole world of its comparative freedom from hampering traditions which block up channels of thought, endeavor and fulfilment.

All this Joan had learnt from them. And what had she done for them? she asked herself. Simply nothing. That was the answer which came to her with a sharp pang of regret as she lay in her berth in the night express to Chicago, on her way to California. She had scarcely had time to thank them, so swift had been her departure, hastened by the ominous telegram which filled

her with anxious foreboding. Her thoughts were full of gratitude towards them all, as her brain, restless and wrought up, reviewed the whole history of her sojourn in New York City.

"Nothing have I done for them or for any one," she said to herself over and over again, until at last she fell asleep, and slept as soundly as in the raven-haired woman's barn on that first night of her flight from her prison home.

"Nothing," she murmured in her sleep.

But the friends whom she had left behind thought otherwise. They were haunted by her simplicity, by her directness, by her curious detachment from circumstance, by her entirely unconscious unworldliness, by some secret spiritual quality in her which made them seem a little garish to themselves, chained down a little too securely to earth, caught up too tightly in material importances. They drank to her health at the supper-club in Greenwich Village, where she had spent many happy evenings since the day when she had first told them about the far-stretching moors and the barn "Never ending," and the thirteenth-century smithy, her birthplace and her home. One of them asked Miss Byrne to say a few words about her; for she had been in closer touch with Joan than any one of them.

But Miss Byrne shook her head, and said, in a voice which had something of a tremor in it:

"What need to speak of a spirit? One feels its presence, its passage, and its pervading, abiding memory."

CHAPTER II

FIVE days later, after a journey fraught with interest for Joan's eagerness, she sat by Crazy Crank's bedside in a lonely ranch in the back country, among the mountains of the San Fernando range in the northern part of Los Angeles country.

"This plan was as good as any other, I suppose?" Mrs. Walpole asked in a low, weak voice, the distant tone of which struck a chill at Joan's heart.

"Better than any other," Joan said, "if indeed there has been any other."

A smile flitted across Crazy Crank's face, and she murmured:

"No plans, no references, no luggage — excellent!"

James Clarke and Joan watched together in the sick room that night. With the exception of themselves, there was no one at hand. Mountains, foothills, great expanses, vast vineyards and far-stretching fruit farms, but human beings none save these three oddly assorted people: a queer, half-witted old woman, a little irresponsible wild bird on the wing, and an elderly Ceylon tea-planter, rough, crude, but infinitely kind.

About two o'clock Mrs. Walpole spoke again, in a voice which seemed to come from a still greater distance:

"Very troublesome these journeys have been. But one had to be faithful to the end."

Later she said in a whisper which was wafted as an echo from a distant shore:

"The pleasantest voyage — I ever had. And in that bad storm you — held my hand — I was not afraid — for

you — were right — what did it matter — what did — it —”

The voice died into a silence. Crazy Crank had finished her last journey by land or by sea.

The early morn wore into day. The hours sped on charged with a great sadness and that mystic awe which Death, the Messenger with sealed orders, instills into every breast.

Joan had never before seen Death; and now she was face to face with it in a strange land, in an isolated home, cut off from every one she knew whose presence might have upheld her in this intensity of a bewildered desolation.

The tea-planter had gone off to the nearest township to make arrangements for the burial; and Joan sat in the bedroom and glanced now at the quiet face of her dead friend and now at the mountains in the distance rigid, bare, uncompromising in outline against the glaring sky.

But gradually the scene outside changed, and lovely sunset tints, as soft and wonderful as those which she and that silent comrade had seen together on their ocean journey, began to temper the garish brightness of the heavens. A purple mantle recalling the vision of the moors in the full glory of heather time was spread over the mountains, until every inch of their grimness had vanished by magic. It was as if Nature had said to them:

“This child alone here, in this lonely ranch, is suffering, her spirit is stricken, her thoughts are full of pain, and her heart is stormed by those hosts of assailing sadnesses, remorse and regrets which overpower poor human beings when the pervading presence of Death arrests their activities and rivets their minds on the true realities and relativities, the underlying values, the eternal importances. She must not suffer without consolation. Console her with the vision of your tenderest loveliness,

link her with some memory of her own life, so that she may know that hard outlines of cruel facts can melt into an undreamed and yet familiar idealism."

The mountains did their work. The child of Nature saw the purple moors of her own home, and was held by them in an ecstasy of joy and gratitude.

Some of the first agony passed from Joan's spirit.

When James Clarke came back that evening and saw her ashen face, he at once set her to work to irrigate some of the neglected lemon trees, and ordered her about in a peremptory fashion which made him smile secretly.

"That will pull her together," he said to himself. "She'll soon be angry with me."

But she was not angry. She did not even notice that she was being driven, so thankful was she to put her strength into something active, and thus be released from the tension of those lonely hours which would have been unendurable but for the intervening help of the merciful mountains. No task that he asked of her would have been unwelcome, no imperiousness out of place. But when he saw that she had passed over the abyss and was finding the trail back to ordinary human concerns, he relaxed his demands, took charge of her, prepared the food, insisted that she should eat, and then lit his pipe and told her many things.

He told her that Mrs. Walpole had loved her brother, and that his illness and death had been a great shock to her. There had been a mystery about that brother. It was supposed that he had served a term of imprisonment many years ago and that he had not cared to stay in England after he had been released. And so, year after year, she had come to see him, never failing him although she dreaded the sea journey and disliked the loneliness and the roughness of the ranch life. But she came out of

pure love and faithfulness. That was what she had meant by saying that one had to be faithful to the end.

"Those are the words we must put on her grave," the tea-planter said gently. "They are the words for her."

They buried her in the cañon hard by, side by side with her brother; and the tea-planter himself carved the words and set up the stone.

When Joan stood there for the last time at the hour of sunset, whilst the heavens and the mountains were mingling in magic loveliness, she read the words, and knew afresh that Crazy Crank's life and death had framed a message for her, and that her own right path lay homewards, homewards to the lonely barn house on the moor.



PART V

CHAPTER I

THE members of the Tudor Club had all disappeared from the lounge room, the servant had cleared away the tea things, tidied up the room and vanished, it is to be hoped for a short period of rest after an exceptionally fatiguing afternoon. Rachel Thorne, who strolled in a few minutes afterwards, sank into an easy chair and contemplated with satisfaction the empty sofas and seats.

"How peaceful," she thought. "Almost could I sleep. I wonder if I'm ill. I feel so tired and docile."

She smiled a little.

"Docile's the word," she repeated. "If any one came and told me to chop my head off, I should do it from sheer docility."

She slept and she dreamed. She dreamed that she was a child again, and she passed once more through the agony of her first bitter grief. She was playing alone in the garden—she was always alone. That beautiful, radiant woman who was her mother had no time for her. Of course not. How could she expect that this wonderful princess mother, whom she adored with a passion of love, could find the time or take the trouble to play with a little silly child? But when those few isolated moments of companionship were vouchsafed to her, what happiness, what rapture seized her soul! And she was going to have one of those moments now. She knew she was. Here was the maid coming to fetch her to the princess's

room. Her heart beat wildly as she ran to greet the messenger of happy tidings. But the woman shook her head.

"Not to-day," she said, with a gentleness which she had never before shown to the child.

And later she was told with criminal ruthlessness by an elderly severe-looking relative of her father, that she must never think of her mother again: for her mother was wicked and had left her home and would never be coming back again, and every one had to forget her.

"No, no, she isn't wicked," the child had cried passionately, "and I won't forget her. And it's you that's wicked. And I hate you."

Rachel Thorne woke up saying the words, "*I hate you.*"

She opened her eyes and saw Joan standing before her smiling.

"You've been dreaming, raven-haired woman," Joan said, "and hating some one frightfully. For I'm sure it's not me you hate. I refuse to believe that."

"My goodness, it is the wild bird returned," Rachel Thorne exclaimed, roused out of any lingering sleepiness by the surprise of finding Joan by her side. "You're right. It isn't you I was hating. I was hating some elderly embodiment of perfection with an Early Victorian frown mingling with gold-rimmed spectacles in an ecstasy of vindictive virtue. Isn't it a comfort that we retain our early hatreds? What should we do without them?"

Joan laughed, and slipped into the chair next to Rachel Thorne.

"And what have you done with Crazy Crank?" she asked. "Where is Crazy Crank?"

"Crazy Crank is dead," Joan said in a low voice. "We buried her in a cañon in Southern California."

Rachel Thorne gave a quick glance at Joan, and saw that there was a distinct change in her. Things had happened to her during these eight months of absence. She

looked older. Sorrow had touched her. Some of the bright insouciance had gone or was in abeyance; and there was on her face an expression of anxious inquiry which smote at the raven-haired woman's heart.

"Poor little wild bird," she thought. "She went out on a joyous flight of her own, and has come back with bruised wings. Really, Life might have spared her this. I have no patience with Life sometimes. And how like Crazy Crank to go and die in a Southern Californian cañon, at the wrong time, instead of embarking to be drowned as usual and as usual turning up at the Club intact, insane and entirely indestructible."

But whatever her thoughts, she gave expression to none of them, and asked no questions of the traveler who had returned. She waited with that indolent patience which was her own delightful characteristic, a curious mixture of laziness, consideration for others and a natural instinct which guarded against jars and dissonances because they were primarily offenses to her own sensitiveness. But whatever the composition of this quality in her, its effect on others was invariably soothing and restoring. And Joan, under its influence, soon found the desire and the ability to speak of her journey to the West, of the lonely ranch, and the long watch, and the quiet death and the burial in the cañon. She was silent for a long time after. It was obvious that this experience had affected her deeply.

"It pulled me up," she said at last. "I felt I wanted to come home to my husband before it was too late."

"Ah, poor man," Rachel Thorne said, so quaintly that Joan laughed. Rachel Thorne laughed too.

"I was not pitying him for your return," she said, "but for these months of your absence. He has suffered, I am sure. Very good for him, of course. But very painful. What a nuisance, isn't it, that things which are good for us, are mostly painful? Knowledge, for in-

stance. And there's your own case. You've learnt things, seen things, faced things, fought things, and have come back, not tamed — I'd never believe that ignominy of you — never — but saddened and worn — not to the pitch of being ancient, I admit ——”

Joan smiled.

“I don't feel ancient, I assure you,” she said. “And I'm not by any means tamed. Anything but tamed.”

“Ah well, that's all right,” Rachel Thorne returned. “I shouldn't like to think of you becoming a canary bird. Rather than that, I would be content to see you a guinea-fowl doomed to perish under my ministering care. They are all dead, those last little lingerers you saw. Keturah capitulated too late. She did capitulate, though. I'll tell you about that afterwards. But now I must take you up to see her.”

“Keturah here?” Joan exclaimed. “In London, in your club?”

“Keturah is at present lying on my bed recovering from a visit to the dentist,” Rachel Thorne said. “She has had her one remaining tooth extracted this morning. As it was her last, I felt strongly that the important tragedy ought to take place in the Metropolis itself. She had been suffering agonies lately, not from knowledge, but from toothache. I didn't know you could have toothache with one tooth only. But apparently you can! Well, let's go up and see her. She'll be overjoyed to see her pet lamb. I must tell you that she and I have become rather friendly. And why, do you think?”

“Because you're awfully good to her, raven-haired woman,” Joan said warmly. “And she has learnt to recognize it.”

Rachel Thorne shook her head. She had risen up, and stood for a moment silent. Then she said:

“No, not because of that. I'm not good to her. If I'm patient with her cantankerousness or Keturahness, it's

only because I'm lazy. Nothing but that. No, she's rather pleased with me. And this is the reason."

She paused. She bit her lip. A shadow passed over her beautiful face. She was going to make her confession to Joan; and it was not an easy task.

"You see," she said, "you trusted me. By some inscrutable irony of fate, I, a woman with a record none too blameless, was chosen to be the channel of communication between yourself and your husband. I was proud of the trust. Fearfully proud. I was uplifted by it. You did an immense service to me. But you put a great strain on a woman of my predilections — a greater strain than you knew, of course — and than I knew."

Joan bent forward. There was an expression of intense anxiety on her face. But not a word escaped her.

Rachel Thorne continued:

"Men, you see, have always fallen an easy prey to my designs when I chose. Here was some one of a type new to me. A new type is very tempting, very tantalizing. I was tempted. Here was a man, abandoned by his wife, lonely, wretched, all at one with himself, suffering from the intense pain brought on by glimmerings of fresh knowledge. I really think he has been suffering from that all the time you've been away. Well, he came to me. I ——"

Joan bent still more forward.

"I had really an awful struggle with myself to let him go unharmed," Rachel Thorne went on. "But I managed it, much to my own astonishment. Because of that trust, you know — that absurd, insane, divine trust. Well, that's not all. You see, he was yearning to know you better. He wanted to speak of you with some one who had been brought in contact with you since you'd left him. Of course I couldn't tell him much. What could I tell him? Nothing really, poor wretch, except that you

were dead tired of the Renaissance: a fatigue with which I could entirely sympathize.

"But I told him to go to your home and learn things there. Or to Keturah and learn things from her. And he did both. But when he landed at my place, he collapsed. When I arrived there one week-end, I found him installed in my home, and Keturah nursing him. There he was, given over into my power. And I was tempted again. Yes, I had to go through that same struggle again. Should I stay, should I go? Of course I wanted to stay — and amuse myself."

She paused.

"Well, I didn't," she added. "I went away the next day. And that is why old Keturah is pleased with me. I hope you are too. You ought to be, you know."

"I am pleased with you," Joan said in a low voice.

"I've not told you this story because I want you to think I am a heroine," Rachel Thorne said. "It is quite enough for me to be sure I am one. No, the whole point of my telling it to you at all, is that I couldn't have looked you in the face if I hadn't made a clean breast of it and confessed to you that I nearly failed — nearly failed — within an inch — an ace."

"But you didn't fail," Joan said. "It is I who have failed."

"Nonsense," Rachel Thorne said. "You only rebelled. You'll only fail in the long run if you regret your rebellion."

"I don't regret it," Joan said staunchly. "I'd rebel again and again. Indeed I would."

And she looked the part so entirely that Rachel Thorne nodded in approval.

"Ah," she said, "I see you're all right. I see I needn't be uneasy about you. And now let's go to old Keturah."

But Joan lingered.

"You've been good to me, raven-haired woman," she

said. "I shall never forget it. Perhaps there may come a time when you may want me to do something for you. I'll do it, if I have to pass through the fire for you."

The raven-haired woman's mouth quivered a little. She nodded her head as if in acceptance of Joan's promise, and then, with a return of her old whimsical manner, she said, as she led the way to the lift:

"It really isn't necessary for us to lay any stress on my being a heroine. Of course I have been one. That's clear. But who knows, self-preservation probably had the most to do with it. Old Keturah would have torn me to shreds, if I'd interfered with pet lamb's husband."

On the threshold of her door she stopped short.

"Ah," she said. "I knew I had something to ask you. I seldom ask questions. Questions are so vulgar, aren't they? And then there's the trouble of asking them. I always was lazy. But I do want to know what work you did in New York. You said in your letter that you'd tell me. Something in the book line, you said. Not even in the poultry-book line. Now what could it be? Good Heavens, don't tell me it was anything in the history-book line? I couldn't bear it. Indeed I couldn't."

"You'll have to bear it," Joan laughed. "It was Renaissance work. It's an awful confession to make; but it's the truth."

"Well then, you're the heroine of this play, not I," Rachel Thorne exclaimed. "I retire, I retreat from the rôle. No terms however favorable could induce me to alter my decision. But what on earth made you choose that penance? There's another question. I am getting vulgar and energetic. I must be careful."

"I had to choose between starvation, taking my husband's money or Keturah's savings, the Renaissance, or—or any old thing, or going on the streets," Joan answered. "And I chose the Renaissance. But I don't

believe any woman going on the streets as her last resource suffered more than I suffered when I gave in."

But Rachel Thorne shook her head.

"You don't know, child, you don't know," she said half to herself. "Only those know — who know."

She paused for a moment with her hand on the door, then tapped lightly and went into the room. She signed to Joan to remain outside, and left the door ajar.

"Keturah," Joan heard her say, "I've news for you which will make you forget you've lost your one remaining tooth. Happy news, old Keturah. But you mustn't be too happy. I can't allow you to get over-excited; for then you'll perish and go the way of the guinea-fowls. Well now, my news is that your pet lamb has come back to England — she's arriving here at any moment — steady, Keturah, remember the guinea-fowls — she's all right, I hear — she has had all sorts of adventures and come through them not too much tamed — you wouldn't like her to be too much tamed, would you? — nor would I — nor would any one — steady, Keturah — I'll go downstairs and wait for her there, for, mind you, she's arriving at any moment now — in fact —"

The next moment old Keturah was crooning over her pet lamb.

CHAPTER II

IT was from Keturah, her old friend, the link between her present self and her childhood in her home surroundings, that Joan learnt that her husband had in very truth been searching in his blind, groping fashion for the trail which led to her. Many times he had told Keturah that his wife had said he must find the path for himself, and that never again would she try to explain herself. She had tried—and in return he had struck her.

“Ye lied, my pet lamb,” Keturah said, “ye said he’d never struck ye.”

“Yes, and I’d lie again,” Joan said quietly. “To you, or any one, Keturah.”

“Ah, that touched up the poor creature,” Keturah said. “That touched him up. But for all that, my lambkin, I didn’t spare him. Not I. He heard many a thing from my tongue. I nursed him, to be sure I did. And scolded him right well, too. But my old heart went out to him, too—the poor, tiresome, lone creature. What for did such as he ever come to our village and take ye away from us all? But there, there! ’Tis now we’ve got to live for, and not the past days. Aye, aye, I nursed him well, and was good to him for my lambkin’s sake foremost, and then a wee bit for his own. And Miss Thorne were good to him, too. She packed up and left him, and never came nigh the place while he was there. She’s won me, lambkin. Her sending that money to ye in my name, selling her family picture and sending good, respectable, honest money to ye in my name, that began it. Yes, she’s won me. I struggled against it. But she’s won me.”

“It was she that sent the money, was it?” Joan ex-

claimed, the tears darting to her eyes. "And in that beautiful, kind, understanding way. Oh, Keturah, she's a brick."

"Aye, she's that," the old woman said. "No harsh word will I ever speak against her no more. That's over."

"I'm glad," Joan said gently, and she added half mischievously:

"Now you'll help her with the guinea-fowls, I suppose?"

"Any amount of them," the old woman answered with a smile. "She can put away the poultry book for always. I told her she could send it away if she liked."

"What did the raven-haired woman say to that?" Joan asked.

"She said she couldn't part with her library," Keturah answered. "Not for worlds, she said."

Joan laughed. And in her laughter there was new tenderness and there was new love for the raven-haired woman.

Then they drifted back to Horace, and Joan learnt how he had longed to send a word of greeting to her, but how his pride had kept him from writing. He had begun many letters to her, and always destroyed them, and always suffered when he had destroyed them. Even from the few isolated details that old Keturah knew and was able to tell her about him, Joan began to realize that he had suffered intensely, and that in spite of everything, her rebellion, those burnt notebooks, her desertion, her silence, he loved her, wanted her, would welcome her, if she could bring herself to forgive him for his own great failure towards her which had been the cause of her defection.

That night as she lay sleepless in one of the bedrooms of the Tudor Club, her heart went out to him again.

Her admiration of his mind had been reawakened when she was working at the Renaissance in New York. Even before she went to that lonely ranch, and saw the things of Life differently in the presence of Death, some numbed and quiescent emotion was beginning to stir in her heart, something which had survived the tyranny of Horace's spell, the intensity of her revolt, the fierceness of her resentment against him for the precious things of which he had deprived her. And now there surged up in her the remembrance of the precious things which he had bestowed on her in exchange: love, comradeship, knowledge, and the means of fulfilment of all those dim dreams of an intellectual life, which but for him, would have died down into nothingness, and left her on the old plane, side by side with Mrs. Gifford, Liz, Seth — dear old Seth — and the rest of them.

The more she thought of all he had done for her, and of all he had suffered in her absence, and of all the happy times they had spent together before she began to be angry and resentful, the more passionately did she desire to be gathered to his breast once more. Not for a moment did she regret she had left him; though she had learnt to regret the manner of her leaving and the coldness of her selfish unconcern, and the heartlessness with which she had brushed him aside as if he had been a mere stranger with no claim on her. She had faced this bitter regret in Crazy Crank's death chamber. It had brought her home, brought her where she was now, this moment, but not as a woolly lamb. No, by no means! The raven-haired woman could rest assured on that point. For never, never could she go back to the old servitude. But she held the belief that he wouldn't wish it. There would be a readjustment. Yes, and a renaissance for them both.

She began to picture her home-coming. What would he say to her? What would she say to him? Would he really welcome her? Oh, yes, yes, of course he would.

Hadn't Keturah said he would? Hadn't the raven-haired woman said so too? And didn't her own heart tell her so? Of course it did.

She began to think of all the things she had to tell him, all those interesting experiences in New York, all about those comrades of hers who had been so good to her, and especially Miss Byrne, and of course about that Renaissance book, the very thought of which still made her angry. And he would laugh at her lovingly as he'd laughed when she had criticized other histories which she knew well were inferior to his great book. But this one — well, really it wasn't any laughing matter. Oh, oh, if the night would only pass, so that she might be on her way to him.

The long night passed at last. Rachel Thorne and she breakfasted together; and then it was that Joan thanked her for cabling that money to New York.

"You can't think how touched I am," she said. "And Keturah tells me that you sold a family picture for the purpose."

Rachel Thorne nodded.

"Yes," she said. "I sold an ugly old ancestress with a face like an onion. It sounds like a great sacrifice, doesn't it?"

But Joan knew the real story and the real reason why that onion ancestress had found her way into an art-dealer's shop. Later, she was to hear of another sacrifice made on her behalf — or rather on behalf of what she stood for — the sacrifice of the black pearl.

Old Keturah and the raven-haired woman accompanied her to Liverpool Street Station and put her into the train for S.

"Now mind," said Rachel Thorne in her whimsical way, "don't let me hear of you turning into even the very wildest specimen of canary bird. If you do, you'll have to forfeit the immense advantage of my acquaint-

ance. And perhaps Keturah's too, since she and I are now on life-long terms of agreeable intimacy."

"No canary bird will my lambkin ever be," old Keturah said with a soft chuckle. "We can be sure about that, can't we, my lambkin?"

"Yes, indeed," laughed Joan. "I'm certain I shan't have to forfeit your acquaintance, dear raven-haired woman."

"But ye'll remember the poor, lone creature has suffered, my lambkin, won't ye?" the old woman whispered.

Joan nodded. Very soft grew the light in her bright eyes, and softer too as the train bore her nearer to her home. Her longing grew stronger with every mile, her pitifulness more mellow, and her resolution more stable to meet and surmount all arising difficulties. She had no illusions. She knew there would be difficulties, immense difficulties, made by herself, made by him, unwillingly, inevitably. But they should, they must be overcome. It was unthinkable that they could not be overcome.

When she stepped on to the platform, the station-master gave a start of surprise, and scarcely remembered his professional duties in his utter astonishment at seeing her. But he got rid of the train with unusual peremptoriness, dashed to his garden, picked one or two of his favorite roses and brought them to her, half eagerly, half shyly.

"Will ye wear these, Mrs. Holbrook?" he said. "They be the finest of my growing."

Joan's face lit with a smile.

"How good of you, Mr. Thursleigh," she said. "English roses, the loveliest sight in the world, I'm sure."

"Aye, you be right," he said.

And he glanced at her, greatly wondering, sorely puzzled, longing to put questions, but maintaining, of course, a discreet silence.

She gave him her ticket, and strolled out of the little

station, down the incline, under the railway bridge and out into the road. There was a man leaning against a gate, smoking a pipe, and she was going to pass him, when something impelled her to look up; and at the same moment he stepped forward.

"Mrs. Holbrook," he said excitedly.

"Mr. Beaudesart," she said, stopping immediately. "How glad I am to see you."

He took her outstretched hand in silence. For a moment he could not trust himself to speak. She sat down on an old moss-grown tree trunk hard by; and he took his place by her side.

"It is good to see you," he said at last. "I have come from old Horace. I have been staying with him for two days. Now I'm on my way home. But I missed the train."

"Tell me about him," Joan said eagerly. "Will he care to see me even though I left him?"

"*Care to see you*," Beaudesart said in a low voice. "He's longing for you, yearning for you in his own queer way. He said he could stand your absence no longer, and that he was going in search of you. The poor old fellow's pride has broken down entirely. And I believe that if you have any lingering resentment against him, you'll lose every bit of it when you see what a plucky stand he has made against himself. He has pulled himself together, worked at that confounded Renaissance, reconstructed those notebooks you burnt — that was awfully cruel of you, you know, Mrs. Holbrook — I can't help saying it — it was awfully cruel —"

"Yes, yes," Joan said, "and I've bitterly, bitterly regretted that part of my rebellion. Indeed I have."

"Of course you have," Beaudesart said kindly. "Well, he has put them together again somehow, but that's not the only thing he has been doing — he has fought his drug habit and triumphed. I do want you to

know that, because it will be a comfort to you and a reassurance, won't it? You must have had awful times over that."

"No, I haven't," she said frankly. "I accepted it just as I accepted the Renaissance. Looking back now, I know I questioned nothing; and I assure you I shudder at the memory of my acquiescence. I think if he'd planned a murder, I should have taken my part in it as a matter of course."

Beaudesart shook his head gravely.

"Not that, not that," he said. But as he spoke he remembered Horace's own boastful allusion to his power over Joan, and he too shuddered.

"Well, well," he went on more cheerfully, "that absurd bondage he imposed on you is now mercifully all over and done with. He regrets everything: all the selfishness, the unreasonableness and cruelty of it, and then his insane suspicion and baseless jealousy — and all that followed."

"And what did actually follow, Mr. Beaudesart?" Joan asked eagerly. "I wish you would tell me."

"Oh, we got at loggerheads, that's all," Beaudesart answered abruptly. "It isn't worth telling now it is past. I was mostly to blame, after all."

"No, it was I," Joan said. "I never ought to have come to your studio."

"That wasn't the beginning of it," Beaudesart said. "It began with all those sketches I drew of you. I couldn't help doing them. Upon my soul, I couldn't. You see —"

He broke off and stared intently on the ground.

"Oh, Mr. Beaudesart, I've made you suffer," Joan said.

"No fault of yours, no fault of yours," he said. "I knew well enough when you came to the studio, you only came because you didn't know any one else in the great

world to go to. If I'd been the Prime Minister or the Pope, or the old greengrocer round the corner, you had to come in any case. I didn't exist for you as a person but as a symbol."

"No, no, you mustn't put it in that way," Joan said gently. "If you hadn't been yourself, and no one else, how could I have had the impulse to come to you?"

He did not seem to hear her.

"You see," he went on, "I tried to get it into his wooden head that if — if you ever fell in love with any other man except himself, it wouldn't be with any one like me, of my age, a fusty old fogey of forty-five, with no dash or go in him: but with some young, dashing, devil-me-care, reckless spirit, the very latest in Airmen, for instance. I think I almost convinced old Horace on this point, and diverted his jealousy from me to that abstract individual in the air. A safe diversion, I believe."

"Yes," Joan said simply. "I love Horace, and no one could take his place. I've never wanted freedom from him, but freedom side by side with him."

"Well, you'll get that now," Beaudesart said. "He has learnt things. You'll find him changed. I'm as dead certain of that as I am that my picture of seagulls fleeing from an aeroplane will never be sold. Never."

"Oh don't say that," Joan said, brightening up. "But how I should like to see it again before it is sold!"

"It will never be sold," he said with a return of his old bright manner. "Some day you'll see it when you come again to the studio under — well, under less dangerous conditions."

A smile flitted across his face. Joan smiled too.

"By Jove," he said, "that was a tough time, wasn't it? But stunning all the same. I shall never forget how you leaped from one picture to another, like a gazelle enraptured first with one rock and then with a second, and then with a third."

"I thought the pictures wonderful, Mr. Beaudesart," she said, her face aglow with the joyful remembrance of that brief moment of thrill. "And I always shall think them wonderful. I used to think of them in New York. Constantly I thought of them."

"Yes, I half knew you did," Beaudesart said involuntarily.

And again Joan saw that look of pain on his face, and again there was borne in on her a realization of the suffering she had brought on others.

"You mustn't allow yourself to suffer like this, dear Mr. Beaudesart," she said impulsively. "Indeed you mustn't. I'm not worth it. In my dash for freedom I seem to have brought misery on every one. I feel frightfully bad about it."

Beaudesart pulled himself together with a great effort.

"Look here," he said, turning to her with a kindness all his own, "you needn't feel like that. My bad time passed long ago. I had it, you know. It's no use swearing I hadn't. But I fought it out helped by palette and paint-brush, and supported unfailingly by all my friends — by Hereford, and Eridge, and Mrs. Parflete our newspaper neighbor, and Bingham my old pal, who conveniently came out of prison at the very moment when I needed him most. Very considerate of the authorities to release him just then. Ah, you'll be much pleased with Bingham. There's a good man for you if you like. Yes, one day you must come to the studio under normal conditions in all the full glory of Early Victorian matronliness, and with old Horace in a top hat and kid gloves — I see him, don't you? Then you'll meet them all — Mrs. Parflete, who gives us the support of her common sense and that old cuss Hereford, and Bingham — if the authorities haven't withdrawn him again — and you'll hear him play on his clarionet — a wonderful consolation, that — and you'll advance soberly and staidly towards my pic-

ture of 'Seagulls fleeing from an aeroplane.' Oh, it will be there, right enough, that picture—I promise you that!"

She looked up at him and smiled a little.

"Well, if it is there," she said, "I'll advance towards it with due stateliness, if I can, and not as a gazelle."

"Not as a gazelle the first time, perhaps," he said cheerily. "But when the air is cleared, as it will be, must be, and all is well between you and me and Horace, I hope to goodness' sake that the gazelle will once more leap from rock to rock in the same rapture of delight and appreciation, having shoved the Early Victorian matron safely and swiftly into the abyss beneath."

She laughed and sprang from the tree trunk.

"I hope so, I'm sure," she said. "It would be awful if she survived, wouldn't it? But I don't see her surviving."

"Nor I," he said; and he rose too.

"And look here, about that suffering," he said half shyly, half casually. "Suffering there has to be in all directions, in every one's dash for freedom. It's inevitable. People get spilt, but they pick themselves up again, as I've done, you see. I shouldn't worry too much about that if I were you. After the suffering comes the healing. I'm healed, you see. You're going to have a try to heal dear old Horace now, aren't you? You've come back for that, come back at some sort of sacrifice to yourself, I bet. Well, you can't do more. So now, good luck to you. If there should be any trouble, you must let me know, as old Horace's friend and your friend. But there won't be any trouble. It wouldn't be possible now. You can go over the moors to him with a light heart. I swear it. Good-by."

He held out his hand, and she took it and said to him in her frank way:

"Mr. Beaudesart, you're a brick. I know well that

you've put all your own feelings aside and have only studied mine. I do thank you with all my heart."

"Nonsense," Beaudesart said. "If you begin to praise me, I shall begin to think I'm a hero. Instead of which I'm only a genius. Now, please remember that once and for all. Good-by again."

He stood watching the little figure until it swung out of sight, over the moors. His impulse had been to go with her for a mile or two, but he restrained himself.

"No," he thought. "That wild bird, with healing in her wings, must go on her homeward flight alone."

CHAPTER III

SUDDENLY, as he still stood watching in the direction in which she had gone, a great anxiety both for her and Horace came over him. Would Horace by any chance be seized by some insane suspicion because he had happened to turn up at the barn house almost at the same time as Joan herself? Would that awful jealousy leap out again and make a devil of him? Surely not after his entire repentance. Hadn't he said only a few hours ago, that he had found his way out of that awful darkness into the light of fresh hope and endeavor, and that never again would he turn back?

All the same, Beaudesart examined himself closely as to whether he had let fall a single remark which might stir up angry or suspicious feelings in Horace's breast. No, he couldn't recall anything indiscreet; except perhaps that when Horace had spoken of the two cables which Joan had received from him, he had explained to Horace that he had sent one on his behalf, as a precaution for which he knew he would be grateful later. And Horace had seemed grateful. Hadn't he said: "Ah, that was a good thought of yours. I was so furious with her, so mortified, that it was only by the barest chance I sent one off on my own bat." That did not sound as if there were any danger involved in the incident. Still, one never knew; and he rather wished he had been silent on the subject. He could not help thinking that it was an unlucky chance that had brought Joan back on the scenes on this particular day. It was only a contingency, of course. Horace would surely recognize it as such, or probably not think about it at all. And yet there

might be unfortunate consequences from it. He half wondered whether he ought to stay behind in the village, in case — in case what? Oh, nonsense. Nothing could happen. There was Horace waiting for her, longing for her. There could be no hitch in that meeting. Of course not. He mustn't invent excuses why he should stay, simply because he wanted to stay. He must go back. Ah, the train at last. Now should he go or stay? Which was it to be? He went.

"It is better so," he said to himself; and as the train sped him further away from Horace's home, he was thankful that he had not remained, eating his heart away for nothing, awaiting some sort of vague tragedy which was not in the least likely to occur. His thoughts turned homewards, to the things which belonged to his life, to the people who made his home atmosphere for him, and amongst whom he counted as some one held in affection. If he had won that for himself out of life, he could never say that he had been left out in the cold.

He began to long insanely for that haven of his, where he had lived for so many years, buried so many ambitions, re-vived them, buried them again, re-vived them, yes, by Jove, and would go on reviving them to the very end. For always there remained one's work. One might push it aside oneself, or let it be pushed aside by people or circumstances, or be entirely unable to prevent it from being pushed aside—but it remained, a permanent inheritance, ready to be claimed when the hour struck, and ever likely to make a sudden and imperious demand on one's power of caring, of visualizing, of fulfilling, of creating. The remembrance of Alfred de Musset's words stole over him, half in reproach, half in encouragement and wholly in mandate:

"Poète, prends ton luth; c'est moi, ton immortelle.
Prends ton luth, prends ton luth! Je ne peux plus me taire.
Qu'as tu fait de ta vie et de ta liberté?"

And as if in direct answer, he began to plan all he intended to do. There were a few more touches to be given to "Seagulls fleeing before an aeroplane"; and he would have a try at his idea of a lark mounting higher and higher, piercing the clouds and disappearing at the same moment as a biplane passed out of sight of human eyes. And then that rain picture he had had in his mind for so long — nothing but rain falling in torrents on a dry land, with some indication of the change it would bring — the upspringing flowers, the fresh young grass, the softened earth: the connecting link, as it were, between cause and effect. Not merely what the eye saw, but what the spirit visualized.

Possessed by these and similar thoughts, Beaudesart arrived outside his studio and paused for a moment, as one often does when one knows one's haven is at hand, in an unconscious anticipation of the peace and pleasure lying safely in wait. There was not a sound to be heard of old Bingham's clarinet, and he said to himself:

"I hope to Heaven old Bingham hasn't been stealing again and got arrested. It really would be too soon after the last affair. Wouldn't be a bad thing if I could keep a jeweler's shop, so that he could have a fling there when the mood was on him. But he'd never steal from me, worse luck. Never lost anything in my life through him except my one and only toothpick."

But when Beaudesart stepped in, he soon saw that his sudden fear was without foundation. Bingham was safely there, together with Hereford, Mrs. Parflete, Eridge and one or two other heterogeneous people of various occupations and persuasions. They were all grouped round the picture "Seagulls fleeing before an aeroplane," which now bore the ominous label *Sold*.

"Sold," he cried, half pleased, half angry. "Who has dared to sell my favorite picture for me? Damned interfering blighter. Some one looking after my welfare again? Same old story all over again. I'll let him know."

And the very last picture I should have dreamed of parting with to any crowned head on earth."

"You're not parting with it to a crowned head, old chap," Bingham put in, "but to the National Gallery. The Trustee said he'd got to have it; and as it wasn't mine, I said 'yes.'"

"The Chantry Bequest would appear to be a desirable goal to have arrived at," remarked Henry Hereford reflectively. "Would that my pictures could reach that distinction. But they never could, not even in a thousand years."

"Ah, you're right," Beaudesart said, winking at Bingham; and they all laughed, including Hereford himself.

"Sold," Beaudesart said again, beginning to be distinctly pleased. "Well, I am taken aback. It makes me quite tremulous to think of it. A tremendous surprise, you know. How on earth is a chap going to bear it? He comes home to his quiet den and finds it turned suddenly into the National Gallery, and no one in the least perturbed, not even Maria, who is licking her paws as if nothing special had occurred."

"Courage, Mr. Beaudesart," said Mrs. Parflete. "You must brace yourself up to bear the shock. You're going to be prosperous, and you must bear it like a man. You must meet your misfortune and accept your fate."

But Eridge, the rich and prosperous, said:

"Heaven forbid. It's a fate I'd never wish for old Beaudesart."

Beaudesart, sinking into his armchair, said:

"No one need be unduly alarmed. I'm as remote from that doom as Eminent Counsel from the Chantry Bequest. More remote in fact. For upon my soul, Hereford, that's a most promising composition of yours, yonder. It's the best thing you've done. Something's inspiring you at last. It can't be the law-courts, and it can't be me."

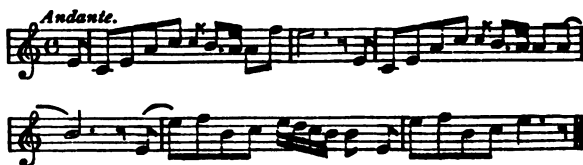
"It's the clarionet," Hereford said, pleased with the praise. "Something in Bingham's music sets one free."

"Well, you just remember that when you want to cage some one up, old chap," Beaudesart thought; but he restrained his impulse to put his idea into words. Instead he said:

"Ah, that's what Bingham does for me too. It was when he was playing, that I thought out the scheme for my rain picture. You just wait and see what I shall make of *that*. 'Seagulls fleeing before an aeroplane' won't be able to hold a candle to it. I shall take good care to paint it in such a way that no one will want to buy it. No fear of that. No danger of prosperity in this establishment, Mrs. Parflete. All necessary precautions taken to avoid that fearsome catastrophe. Gad, I'm hungry. Perhaps we could run to some supper, by the grace of the Chantry Bequest. The Chantry Bequest! Can't get the damned thing out of my mind! Well, it is rather pleasant when you come to think of it soberly, though of course it is a nuisance having one's welfare studied in this way. Still one has to put up with inconveniences sometimes. And this is a ripping sort of surprise. An awfully comforting sort of home-coming. All the more so because I was feeling a bit down—a bit desolate. On the moor I stood and watched—"

He broke off suddenly. He had unwittingly conjured up for himself a vision of Joan, that little wild bird hastening over the moor, with healing in her wings, not for him, never for him, never.

Then Bingham, with the unerring instinct of a musician, took up his clarionet:



CHAPTER IV

JOAN meantime was hastening towards her home, heartened by Beaudesart's account of Horace's longing for her, doubly eager to pick up the threads and weave for herself and him some new pattern which would not wear out, which would stand the everyday wear and tear of different outlooks. She had no illusions about the difficulties in store for both of them; but they seemed to her as mere trifles compared with the largeness of the joy awaiting her, with the rebirth of intimate understanding and a reconciliation of body, soul and spirit. And very beautiful seemed the moor to her, and the stretch of sky above her, and the dead ling and heather and the bracken and moss, and that little ~~corps~~ ^{copse} of fir trees on the left, in the distance, and the windmill with the grass steps up to it, and that blackened birch, struck by lightning — all these little details of the countryside, landmarks precious and imperishable. Once only she paused in her onward haste, and then it was to think of Beaudesart.

"I would never have wished to make him suffer," she said aloud. "Indeed I wouldn't. If I knew how to help him and heal him, indeed I would. And perhaps some good chance will come. Perhaps his feeling for me will pass into friendship which I can share with Horace — something to help us all in the best way. And won't I just try to make it a splendid friendship, flawless and yet free. I promise you that, Mr. Beaudesart, if you can take it from me. I promise it on these moors — near my home — near Horace himself."

On she went, with buoyant step and light heart. Not

one single misgiving assailed her. The words from Shakespeare's sonnet stole over her remembrance:

"As easy might I from myself depart
As from my soul, which in thy breast doth lie.
That is my home of love: if I have ranged,
Like him that travels, I return again."

She reached the enclosure. The gate was open, and she passed inside. The next moment she was knocking at the door of the home which had once been hers, and was still hers since Horace loved and longed for her. There was no answer. Her heart began to beat as she knocked again. Then she heard him coming down the trap-door stairs; and her heart gave a bound, a leap. He opened the door.

"Horace," she said, "is it true you want me, care for me — even though I left you?"

She saw the light in his eyes, she saw his arms held out to her. But as she stepped forward, she saw the light fade away, she saw his arms fall to his sides. She stood on the threshold of her home as one paralyzed. What could it all mean? Hadn't he wanted her after all? Hadn't she been given to understand direct from old Keturah and from Beaudesart too, that in spite of everything, her rebellion, her desertion, her callous silence, he loved her, wanted her, yearned for her?

But the expression on his face, and his very first words undeceived her.

"Ah, you're there, are you?" he said, in a tone of voice that froze her spirit. "Come back with Beaudesart, have you? And you ask me to believe that this is a coincidence. Oh, I'm not such a fool as you think me. No, you can go away again. I don't want you. You can catch the same train if you hurry. But in any case he is waiting at the station for you, isn't he? You can go to him — do you hear me? I don't want you."

I never did want you back. Go to him — or any one for all I care. Oh, I'm not the fool you think me. I can see through all this."

"You must be mad," Joan said almost inaudibly.

"Mad," he exclaimed with increasing rage. "That's just what I'm not. Mad because I don't want you? No, mad if I did want you. Go back to him and hear from him again the whole story of what passed between us. He has told you already, I'll be bound. You've heard the details. Oh yes, you can believe them, I did plan to kill him. He's quite right. And I'll plan it again — all over again — and do it this time and hang for it gladly."

Joan stepped back. She shuddered.

"I don't understand one single word of what you're saying, except that you don't want me," she said, almost in a whisper. "That, of course, I can understand. And I'll go at once. But this much I must claim to say, in justice to myself — I would never have troubled you if I had not learnt from Keturah that — that I should be welcome. But she was evidently mistaken."

"Yes, she was mistaken," he said in biting accents.

He closed the door, leaving her standing outside.

She passed instantly out of the enclosure and did not pause a single moment until she was out on the open moor. Then she sat down, and tried to think; for she was half stunned and stupefied. So this was her home-coming. She had made an entire mistake in allowing herself to suppose or to be persuaded for a moment that he wanted her. She might have known that a man of his nature would never forgive her for her desertion of him, and that his resentment and jealousy, once roused, would never be lulled. But far worse than all this was what he had said about having planned to kill Beaudesart. Oh, it simply couldn't be true. He must have just imagined it. He must be under the fearful

delusion of it. It couldn't be true. But suddenly she recalled Beaudesart's words: "*His insane suspicions and baseless jealousy — and all that followed.*"

What exactly had followed? Was it this? No, no, it couldn't be anything so dreadful, so utterly horrible. She sprang up, unable to stay still for a moment after these torturing thoughts had taken possession of her.

She wandered over the moor, tireless, tense, torn by the knowledge that if this were true, it was part of her doing, and that she was directly responsible for Horace's state of mind and for any evil thing he had planned to be or do. It was this realization that overwhelmed her far more than his repulse of her. She had earned that, played for it, and she had no right to complain of it, or combat it. He had shut her out — and she accepted his decision.

It was a blow, of course, to her pride, her reawakened love, her deep and true regrets and her eagerness to make a new and splendid life for Horace and herself. It was absurd to say it wasn't a blow. But far, far worse than this personal repulse was the harm she had evidently done to him. And as she tramped the moors, she passed through an agony of suffering, intensified by her very powerlessness to undo the work, repair the mischief, which were some of the results of her rebellion. Not that she for one moment repented of her rebellion. She couldn't repent.

"I couldn't, I couldn't," she said passionately. "Life was impossible to me on those lines, and would have become increasingly impossible."

And here was the misery of it: to know that with his temperament and her temperament, she, once aroused, could not have acted differently, and yet to be conscious that what she had gained, she had gained by injuring him. It was entirely characteristic of Joan that she did not give a passing thought to temporal concerns, where

she should go, where she should shelter, what she should do now that she had been turned away from her home. Sitting lightly ever to circumstance, she was free from the bonds of detail, but caught up and held a prisoner in a network of spiritual doubt, perplexity, horror, despair, disheartenment. Her release only came when, conscious suddenly of fatigue, she threw herself on the ground and fell fast asleep.

Again Nature folded this child of Nature to her bosom and kept her safe from all harm. The stars watched over her; the wind for her sake was lulled to a whisper; the rain threatening from the south changed the direction of its passage; all the wandering spirits of the night hovered not around her, so that she might rest in very truth, undisturbed by outer influence, by alien atmosphere.

And hark, hark, over the stillness of the moor was wafted the sound of the blacksmith's hammer on his anvil. Nearer and nearer it came. Clearer and clearer rang the note of its healing music. Joan smiled in her sleep and murmured:

"Father — father — yes, yes — I've come back to you — the pride of the forge always — always."

CHAPTER V

THE moment Horace closed the door on her, he had a dim realization of what he had done in his insane jealousy ; but he defended himself by an access of anger and accusation, and kept on shouting to himself as he went up the trap-door stairs :

“ A plant, a plant, that’s what it is. No, I’m not as easily deceived as that. Thought she was wanted, did she? Well, she knows the truth now. I never wanted her. Never. Ah, I knew it. I knew it all the time Beaudesart was talking to me. Cabled money to her, did he? Cabled money to her, did he? In my name too. That was a good idea, wasn’t it? Ah, I felt sure there was something at the back of it all the time. Wanted her? Never. Never.”

But he had wanted her intensely, passionately, increasingly — and on her own terms. He had poured out the whole history of his longing to Beaudesart, and he had said that he could no longer stand being without her, and that he must go and find her, no matter where she was, even in the most distant quarter of the globe, but find her he must, for life was intolerable without her, work was intolerable without her, nothing mattered without her. He said that the gulf between the time when he had delighted in molding her to his own pattern and this present time in the history of their relationship was vast, immeasurable, and that instead of his spell being on her, her spell was on him, and that he was content it should be so, and that now he wanted her for her own self, for all her own natural qualities, for her own individuality, for all those things pertaining to her in which

he had had no part. All this he had told Beaudesart.

But there was a great deal he had not told. For how could he have put into words the intensity of his longing, how could he have described the tremulous expectation with which he thought of their meeting, and the rapture of his spirit, as the memory of the sound of her voice was wafted nearer to his eagerly listening ears?

It was nothing to him now that she had burnt those notebooks, ignored him, looked past him, abandoned him, cast him off. He it was who had to ask forgiveness from her, not she from him. And he would ask it in true humility. He would tell her that he had learnt his lesson, that he understood at last, and that he could and would be different, if she would give him a chance. She would see that he was a different man from the tyrant who had held her in a bondage which had eventually driven her away—a different man from the devil who had schemed against his own best friend and compassed his end, and who had sunk so low, lost his way and all his bearings, and was unworthy to be loved or borne with—but with a new chance given by her, could yet “make good.”

Then the chance had come—the “resplendent minute”—and he was impelled by the demon within him to fling it aside.

For a long time that demon held him in a vice and stirred up all the evil in him. Yes, he would have his revenge—not a second time should Beaudesart get off so easily—he’d take care of that—and as for Joan herself, let her see to it that she kept her distance. Want her back? Never. When had he said he wanted her back? Never. It was a lie—one of their lies. A concerted plot. That’s what it was. Any fool could see that. She and Beaudesart had arrived together of course, Beaudesart first to take soundings, and she near at hand, primed with all that had taken place between Beaudesart

and himself, so that she might hold him in her power. A pretty sort of plan indeed—and they expected him to be deceived by it. Deceived. By God, no. He was equal to the pair of them. They'd soon find that out.

On and on he raged. But when the fire within him was at its fiercest, suddenly a change took place. His anger ceased to glow, the heat of his hatred began to cool off, the flames of his frenzy no longer leapt free and uncontrolled. They died down, and with them the demon at whose bidding they had sprung to life.

Horace cast himself on the couch.

"My God, what have I done?" he cried in his agony of spirit.

The meaning of what he had done broke on him, descended on him like a blast. He sprang up and dashed downstairs to the door. He flung it open.

"Joan, Joan," he cried. "I want you—Joan, Joan, my little Joan."

There was no answer.

"Joan, Joan," he called again. "I have always wanted you—all the time—every hour, every minute."

There was no answer.

"Joan," he cried. "Come to me, my little one, my own little darling."

Not a sound, not a sign in response.

The devastating silence, the deepening darkness struck a chill at the lonely man's heart as he stood listening for a voice which he knew in his heart of hearts he would never hear. For he knew that she had gone, knew that her proud little spirit would not have suffered her to remain one single moment outside the home from which he himself had thrust her.

He fetched a lantern, and wandered over the moor in search, calling her name as he had called it before on that first night of her rebellion, when she had flung down

the notebook and disappeared into the solitudes of the night, out of reach, out of ken, as now.

It was nearly two hours before he came back, broken-hearted and in despair.

"My God, what have I done?" he kept on murmuring.

He shivered. He drew up to the fire and cast logs on it recklessly. He drew nearer to it and threw more logs; but nothing availed to warm him. His hands, his feet were deadly cold; and stone cold was his heart.

"Nothing to live for," he murmured, "nothing to keep decent for — and my own fault."

He dragged himself to his bedroom, and stood for a moment looking at the manuscript of the Renaissance, piled up on the table by his bed where he had worked so hard at it, alone, but bravely, and always with the hope at the back of his heart, that one day he would be able to show to Joan what he had done in her absence, what he had altered, improved, rejected. There it lay intact, almost finished — and yet for him a meaningless structure — in ruins — wrecked by him. He turned away from it, and took from a drawer the drug from which he had been abstaining ever since he had been seized with horror of himself and his murderous intention towards Beaudesart. He injected a strong dose, and with a sigh of relief, returned to the fireside.

"At least now I shall forget for the time," he said. "And to-morrow I must think what is to be done."

He shivered again, threw on yet another log, sank back in his chair, was soon drowsy, then inanimate, and then deep under the influence of the drug.

CHAPTER VI

JOAN woke up in the early morning renewed and calmed. Her long sleep under Nature's care, and her communion with her father had strengthened her and given her the courage to go on, in spite of the unexpected repulse which she had met from her husband, and in spite of her realization of her own spiritual failure.

"At least nothing can take from me now the joy of my reunion with my father and my old home," she said. "That remains as my abiding possession out of the wreck I've made of everything. Horace might turn me out a thousand times. But a thousand times the forge would shelter me, and my father's voice welcome me."

Had she not already proved that in the hours of dire distress this consolation would not be denied her? In the garden of the new smithy: in New York on the first night of her sojourn with Miss Byrne: in California, in Crazy Crank's death chamber: and on the moor here, within a mile or two of her husband's house now barred against her, this message of reassuring support had been borne to her from the spiritual world, the only true world.

She knew she could count on it forever more, wherever her path lay, over the waters, over the mountains — everywhere. And her thoughts turned to the woman at the new smithy who would always be linked up with her memories of her old home, not as a stranger, not of alien influence, but as one merged, as she herself wished it, in the very spirit of the place. Again the words she had quoted, echoed back to Joan:

"By ghostly banners led,
By arms invisible helped in the strife.
Without the friendship of the happy dead
How could we bear our life?"

But Joan felt no bitterness towards Horace. She said to herself repeatedly that she had played for this result, and that it was natural enough that he should turn away from one who had revolted against him, deserted him, outraged his pride, and moreover kept him in entire ignorance of her movements, her plans, her attitude of mind. How could she have expected otherwise?

How could she have been such a fool as to believe that he did want her? Yet she did not regret her return. She had heard the compelling call to return on that long, sad night in that far-off ranch when she watched by Mrs. Walpole's death-bed. She knew that if she had not responded to it, things would have been far worse with her. Far, far better to have come back and to have been spurned, than to have remained rigidly away, hugging her freedom, and ignoring obligations with a callousness of heart, the remembrance of which made her increasingly ashamed.

"It is awful to have been so callous and indifferent," she thought. "One only realizes the enormity of it when one looks back calmly and dispassionately."

Not once did she try to excuse her indifference on the score that it was the natural result of a tyranny which had become unbearable. No, instead she said quite frankly:

"Somehow I ought to have managed my rebellion differently — with less heartlessness. But at least my return hasn't been a failure. The greater failure would have been if I had not come. I shall always be glad I knocked at the door of my home, even though it wasn't opened to me."

But now what was she going to do? She could not

stay in the neighborhood, of course, and she must not dream of venturing anywhere near her native village.

If Seth, dear old Seth, were by any chance to hear of her return and her reception, he would kill Horace to a certainty—"ax" him, as he called it. No, she must steal off at once, report herself to the raven-haired woman and Keturah, and then—? Well, why not go back to America? That would be the best plan and the simplest. She could find work there and ready comradeship, and a niche waiting for her. She would be a duffer not to fill it. Of course she would go.

A smile came into her face as she thought of Miss Byrne and Miss Emory and Mr. Perry and the other members of her special group, and her friends at Greenwich Village, and Mr. Post and her comrades at the great publishing house. She wouldn't be able now to take them on a "round trip" to the barn house, the moors, the Wheatsheaf, the river, the pond with its three great elms, and "Never ending." Well, well, that couldn't be helped.

But now, before she left, supposing she went to have just one last look at the barn house.

"I would love to see it once more," she said to herself. "No one is astir yet. No one need know if I do creep round quietly. For, after all, I was very, very happy until my awakening came. Hundreds of happy hours Horace and I have spent there together. So kind he was—so gentle. I can't—I can't believe he could have planned the destruction of any one. I won't believe it. I wonder whether he has worked at the Renaissance. I should like to have confessed to him how bitterly, bitterly sorry I was that I burnt those notebooks. And I should also like to have told him of the Renaissance penance I did in New York. So many things I wish I could have told him, asked him, explained to him—without constraint—because I was free."

For the first time a tear stood in her eye; but she pressed her finger into her eye and kept it closed for a moment. The expression on her face became tense, and tense the bearing of her figure. She looked a brave little figure standing up to the complications of life, some of them of her own making, some of them thrust upon her by fate and circumstance and the demands of her temperament and of her generation.

Then she set herself in the direction of her home, and in spite of the emotions struggling in her breast, could not but enjoy the freshness of the early morning, the flight of birds, the play of light in the heavens, the smell of the earth, the sound of Nature alert, awake.

Not a solitary soul did she meet; and she was thankful to think that no one in the village would ever know the history of her return. All that any one could learn, would be that she had returned, and then vanished, like a spirit.

But as she was rejoicing over this one propitious circumstance, Melton, the shepherd, driving his flock, approached from the left and met her almost face to face. He stopped short, as he had always stopped when he had encountered her in this same way, in the early morning, year in, year out. His face lit up with smiles.

"Why, this be a bit of sunshine, this be," he said. "Aye, but we've missed ye, Mrs. Holbrook. The moors have been right dull, and the sheep right daft, I can tell ye."

Joan laughed, and he laughed too. The meeting might be inopportune, but the greeting wasn't. And she was thankful for it, and grateful to him that he asked her no questions. It was enough for him to have this unexpected renewal of her comradeship which had always meant much to him. Thanks to Old Jacob's training in her childhood's days, she could talk and understand about sheep in a way that delighted Melton; and so now he

gave her the news of the flock in the full belief that she would be just as interested in it as she was eight months ago or more.

She was. And she said:

"Well, Melton, from all you tell me, I don't think they can be so daft after all. They might have perished in that snowstorm, you know. Instead of which, they deliberately took shelter in the new barn. I call that highly intelligent. It seems to me that they've developed brains instead of lost them in my absence!"

"Aye, aye, perhaps they have," he said, pleased with her praise of his beloved flock.

Suddenly he stopped and sniffed the air.

"A smell of burning," he said. "Don't ye smell something burning? Some of they tramps firing the moor again, I'll be bound."

She had stopped, too.

"Yes, I smell it," she said.

For a little while they passed on in silence. But all at once she stopped again, framed her eyes with her hands, scanned her home, which had now come into sight, and exclaimed:

"Melton, it isn't the moor — it's my home."

And before the meaning of her words had dawned on him, she had dashed off at full speed.

"My poor Horace, my poor Horace," she cried. "What has been happening to you, alone, wretched and miserable?"

As she rushed to the rescue, it flashed across her mind that it was more than probable that he had been drug-ging himself and, careless as ever of fire, had piled on the logs and sunk into one of those stupors of which she had often had experience, but which, as she told Beaudesart, she had accepted as she accepted the Renaissance, or anything else that pertained to him.

She tore into the enclosure, across the little yard, up the steps. Would she never reach the door? Endless seemed the way. She opened the door. A thin thread of smoke greeted her. She raced up the stairs and opened the trap-door, and was met by an onrush of smoke, from which for one moment she recoiled. She fought through it, reached the room, and saw the motionless form of her husband huddled up by the fireside.

She seized hold of him instantly, tried to rouse him, failed, then half dragged him, half carried him, and with superhuman strength and effort brought her burden safely downstairs into the open air. She knelt down, loosened his collar, undid his shirt, heard Melton's voice, and signing wildly to the shepherd to look after him, she dashed up the stairs again. The thought had leapt to her quick brain:

"His work—the book of his life—that must be saved at any cost."

Once again she made her way into the room, and this time at increased risk. The smoke was already denser, and the fire, which had been smoldering for hours, was now sending out tongues of angry flames, precursors of a general conflagration.

She dashed to the bureau, opened the drawer where they used to keep the Renaissance—and found it empty—opened another drawer, found it empty too, tried a third drawer, found it locked, tugged at it, tore at it, tried to shake it open, and then suddenly remembered that the book might be in his bedroom, on the table by his bedside.

Why hadn't she thought of that before?

Would she have time?

She sprang to the bedroom door, couldn't get it open in her feverish haste, and turned and turned the handle in vain. At last she succeeded. She dashed into the room. She saw the manuscript on the table. She leapt

at it with a half-fierce cry, clasped it tightly to her breast and dashed out.

Later, when Horace came back to a dim realization of what had occurred, he was conscious of her little figure kneeling by his side, and of the touch of her hands against his face.

"Joan, my little Joan," he murmured, "and you saved me when you could have freed yourself from me. What a wonderful, wonderful thing."

For answer, he saw the light of love in her eyes.

THE END

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